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# A COMPANION TO MEDIEVAL PALERMO

*The History of a Mediterranean City  
from 600 to 1500*



*Edited by*

ANNLIESE NEF

BRILL

# A Companion to Medieval Palermo

# Brill's Companions to European History

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The History of a Mediterranean City  
from 600 to 1500

*Edited by*  
Annliese Nef

*French and Italian texts translated by*  
Martin Thom



BRILL

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*Cover illustration:* Marble inlay with the acrobat on the floor of the Martorana.  
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## CONTENTS

List of Figures .....	ix
Acknowledgements .....	xiii
Abbreviations .....	xv
List of Contributors .....	xvii

The Medieval History of Palermo in a New Light .....	1
<i>Annliese Nef</i>	

### FROM AN EMPIRE TO ANOTHER EMPIRE (VITH–XITH)

1. Palermo in the Eastern Roman Empire .....	11
<i>Vivien Prigent</i>	
2. Islamic Palermo and the <i>dār al-islām</i> : Politics, Society and the Economy (from the mid-9th to the mid-11th Century) .....	39
<i>Annliese Nef</i>	
3. From a Small Town to a Capital: The Urban Evolution of Islamic Palermo (9th–mid-11th Century) .....	61
<i>Alessandra Bagnera</i>	
4. Palermo Experienced, Palermo Imagined. Arabic and Islamic Culture between the 9th and the 12th Century .....	89
<i>Mirella Cassarino</i>	

### THE HAUTEVILLE'S EXPERIMENT (XITH–XIITH)

5. Norman Palermo: The Capital of a Kingdom or the Dream Scene of an Empire? .....	133
<i>Annliese Nef</i>	
6. Norman Palermo: Architecture between the 11th and 12th Century .....	139
<i>Rosi Di Liberto</i>	

7. Palermo in the 12th Century: Transformations in *forma urbis* ... 195  
*Elena Pezzini*

PALERMO AND THE MEDITERRANEAN  
 AT THE END OF THE MIDDLE AGES

8. Palermo in the 14th–15th Century: Urban Economy  
 and Trade ..... 235  
*Henri Bresc*
9. Palermo in the 14th–15th Century: The Urban Society ..... 269  
*E. Igor Mineo*

TRANSVERSAL APPROACHES

10. Palermo as a Stage for, and a Mirror of, Political  
 Developments from the 12th to the 15th Century ..... 299  
*Laura Sciascia*
11. The City of Foreigners: Palermo and the Mediterranean  
 from the 11th to the 15th Century ..... 325  
*Gian Luca Borghese*
12. Religious Palermo: A Panorama between the 12th and the  
 15th Centuries ..... 349  
*Henri Bresc*
13. Monreale from Its Origin to the End of the Middle Ages ..... 383  
*Sulamith Brodbeck*
14. Linguistic Cultures and Textual Production in Palermo, from  
 the End of the 11th to the End of the 15th Century ..... 413  
*Benoît Grévin*
15. The Jews of Palermo from Late Antiquity to the Expulsion  
 (598–1492–93) ..... 437  
*Giuseppe Mandalà*

## CONCLUSIVE PERSPECTIVES

16. Citizens and Freedom in Medieval Sicily .....	489
<i>Fabrizio Titone</i>	
Indicative Bibliography .....	525
Index .....	529





## LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 3.1. Map of Palermo giving the location of the various sites from the Islamic period, and of the monuments mentioned in the text .....	87
Fig. 3.2. Map of Palermo showing the location of Norman <i>solacia</i> (12th century) in relation to the Islamic city .....	88
Fig. 6.1. Cappella Palatina. Plan of the lower Church .....	175
Fig. 6.2. Cappella palatina. Longitudinal section .....	175
Fig. 6.3. The floor of the Cappella Palatina .....	176
Fig. 6.4. Plan of the Cappella Palatina .....	177
Fig. 6.5. The wooden ceiling of the Cappella Palatina with <i>muqarnas</i> .....	177
Fig. 6.6. Cappella Palatina. A pannel of the central nave's pavement .....	177
Fig. 6.7. Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio (the Martorana). Reconstruction of the various building phases .....	178
Fig. 6.8. Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio (the Martorana). The dome at the centre of the church .....	178
Fig. 6.9. Plan of the Martorana .....	179
Fig. 6.10–11. Floor of Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio (the Martorana). The entrance panel and the central panel beneath the dome ...	180
Fig. 6.12. Plan of the church of San Cataldo .....	181
Fig. 6.13. Church of San Cataldo. View of the apses .....	182
Fig. 6.14. Church of San Cataldo. Longitudinal section .....	182
Fig. 6.15. The three domes along an axis of the church of San Cataldo .....	183
Fig. 6.16–17. Church of San Cataldo. Plan and photograph of the panel in front of the northern entrance .....	184
Fig. 6.18. Church of San Cataldo. Geometrical schema of the panel in front of the northern entrance .....	184
Fig. 6.19. Maredolce or Favara. Plan of the palace .....	185
Fig. 6.20. Section of the church of San Filippo and Giacomo .....	185
Fig. 6.21. Zisa, reconstruction of the planimetry .....	186
Fig. 6.21a. The epigraph in Arabic characters from the Zisa turned into the palace battlements .....	186

Fig. 6.22. Zisa, speculative reconstruction of the plan on three floors .....	187
Fig. 6.23. Cuba. Longitudinal section and plan .....	188
Fig. 6.23a. Cuba. Speculative reconstruction of the plan .....	188
Fig. 6.24. Plan of the Palazzo dei Normanni showing the medieval parts which survive .....	189
Fig. 6.25. Torre Pisana. Plan of the ground floor and of the first floor .....	189
Fig. 6.26. Plan of the al-Manar <i>donjon</i> .....	189
Fig. 6.27. Santa Maria Maddalena. Plan and cross-section .....	189
Fig. 6.28. San Giovanni degli Eremiti, plan, longitudinal section and axonometric reconstruction of the building phases .....	190
Fig. 6.28a. San Giovanni degli Eremiti, longitudinal section .....	190
Fig. 6.28b. San Giovanni degli Eremiti, axonometric reconstruction of the building phases .....	190
Fig. 6.29. San Giovanni dei Lebbrosi, plan and sections .....	191
Fig. 6.30. Santo Spirito or “dei Vespri”. Plan, view of the apses and cross-section .....	192
Fig. 6.31. SS. Trinità or Magione. Plan of the monastic complex and longitudinal section .....	193
Fig. 6.32. Capital with acrobats from the cloister at Cefalù .....	194
Fig. 6.32a. Marble inlay with the acrobat on the floor of the Martorana .....	194
Fig. 6.32b. Capital with acrobat in the cloister at Monreale .....	194
Fig. 7.1. Palermo in the late Islamic period .....	228
Fig. 7.2. Norman Palermo. Monuments, sites and archaeological excavations mentioned .....	229
Fig. 7.3. Casa Martorana .....	231
Fig. 7.4. Casa Martorana’s door jamb .....	232
Fig. 8.1. An economical map of Palermo (XIIIth–XVth centuries) ...	267
Fig. 8.2. An economical map of the Conca d’Oro (XIIIth–XVth centuries) .....	268
Fig. 10.1. The <i>theatrum imperialis Palacii</i> (Peter of Eboli, <i>Liber ad honorem Augusti</i> , Burgerbibliothek Bern, Cod. 120 II, f° 142 r.) .....	321
Fig. 10.2. William II’s death (Peter of Eboli, <i>Liber ad honorem Augusti</i> , Burgerbibliothek Bern, Cod. 120 II, f° 98 r.) .....	322
Fig. 10.3. The emperor Henry VI receives Palermo’s envoys before making a triumphal entrance into Palermo (Peter of Eboli, <i>Liber ad honorem Augusti</i> , Burgerbibliothek Bern, Cod. 120 II, f° 134 r.) .....	323

Fig. 12.1. Religious amenities of the Conca d'Oro (XIIth–XVth) .....	380
Fig. 12.2. Religious Palermo (XIIth–XVth centuries) .....	381
Fig. 12.3. Churches of Palermo (XIIth–XVth centuries) .....	382
Fig. 13.1. Plan of the monastery of Monreale, 1166–1189 .....	408
Fig. 13.2. The cloister of the monastery of Monreale, south-west corner, 1166–1189 .....	409
Fig. 13.3. Barisano of Trani's bronze door, the northern flank of the cathedral, Monreale, 1166–1189 .....	410
Fig. 13.4. Mosaic decoration, looking eastwards from the nave, Monreale cathedral, 1166–1189 .....	411
Fig. 13.5. View of the royal throne, and of the mosaic panel representing William II crowned by Christ, Monreale cathedral, 1166–1189 .....	412



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## ABBREVIATIONS

ACFUP: *Acta Curie felicis urbis Panormi*

ASP: Archivio di Stato di Palermo

BAS ar.: Michele Amari, ed., *Biblioteca arabo-sicula*, Arabic version, new edition revised by Umberto Rizzitano, Edizione nazionale delle opere di Michele Amari. Serie arabistica (Palermo, 1988)

BAS it.: Michele Amari, ed., *Biblioteca arabo-sicula, versione italiana* (Rome-Turin, 1880–1881), anastatic reprint (Catania, 1982)

C: Cancillería, Registros. Archivo de la Corona de Aragón di Barcellona *Cappella Palatina*: Beat Brenk, ed., *La Cappella Palatina a Palermo, Mirabilia Italiae 17* (Rimini, 2010)

Cusa: Salvatore Cusa, *I diplomi greci ed arabi di Sicilia pubblicati nel testo originale, tradotti ed illustrate* (Palermo, 1868–1882)

Di Stefano-Krönig: Giuseppe Di Stefano, *Monumenti della Sicilia normanna*, sec. ed. Wolfgang Krönig (Palermo, 1979)

FSI: Fonti per la Storia d'Italia

Gabrieli-Scerrato: Francesco Gabrieli and Umberto Scerrato, ed., *Gli Arabi in Italia* (Milano, 1979).

Ibn Ḥawqal, it.: Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb Ṣūrat al-arḍ* (*Configurazione della Terra*), trans. Adalgisa De Simone, *Descrizione di Palermo di Ibn Ḥawqal*, in Rosario La Duca, ed., *Storia di Palermo. II. Dal tardo antico all'Islām* (Palermo, 2000), pp. 116–27.

*Kitāb Gharā'ib*, it.: Jeremy Johns, “Una nuova fonte per la geografia e la storia della Sicilia nell’XI secolo: il *Kitāb Gharā'ib al-funūn wa-mulāḥ al-‘uyūn*”, *MEFRM* 116–1, 2004, 409–449. An online version in English is also available: Emilie Savage-Smith and Yossef Rapoport (eds.), *The Book of Curiosities: A critical edition*. World-Wide-Web publication. ([www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/bookofcuriosities](http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/bookofcuriosities)) (March 2007)

MEFRM: *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome-Moyen Âge*

MGH SS: Monumenta Germaniae Historica Scriptores

P. R.: Protonotaro del Regno. Archivio di Stato di Palermo

R. C.: Real Cancelleria. Archivio di Stato di Palermo

RIS: Rerum Italicarum Scriptores





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## THE MEDIEVAL HISTORY OF PALERMO IN A NEW LIGHT

Annliese Nef

The city of Palermo, more than most perhaps, gives rise to dreams and is invested with images and descriptions both negative and positive, where the present and the past often collide.<sup>1</sup> Located in the centre of the Mediterranean, it sits within a sheltered harbour on the north-west coast of Sicily, an island whose contours delimit two crucial spaces in the east-west navigation of that sea (the Sicilian channel and the straits of Messina).

The original urban core, oriented NE-SW,<sup>2</sup> was established on a promontory delimited by two water courses: to the north, the Papireto, and to the south, the Kemonia, both of which flowed into the sea. Surrounded by the fertile plain with its many gardens known as the “Conca d’Oro,” Palermo is encircled by mountains, among them the famous Monte Pellegrino, which is 600 metres at its summit. From the Islamic period onwards, the urban fabric exceeded the limits of the first fortified urban core, but this latter continued to be the heart of the city throughout the whole of the medieval period.

### FROM THE CAPITAL OF AN IMPERIAL PROVINCE (6TH–11TH CENTURY) TO THE CAPITAL OF A KINGDOM (11TH–15TH CENTURY)

At first a city and bishopric of middling importance within the rich Byzantine province of Sicily (6th–9th century),<sup>3</sup> Palermo became in the 9th century the Emiral capital of Islamic Sicily. Being drawn from the time of its conquest in 831 into the orbit of the Aghlabids (800–909), who were

---

<sup>1</sup> Consider, for example, the issue of *La pensée de midi*, 8 (2002), entitled “Retrouver Palerme”.

<sup>2</sup> The principal axes of the historical core, in particular via Marmorea, or Cassaro, the present-day Corso Vittorio Emanuele, retained the same orientation throughout the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, in an attempt to simplify things, geographers, like the notarised medieval deeds, describe them as east-west axes. In order to complicate things still further, contemporary cartography represents the Cassaro (south-west/north-east) as if it were oriented north-south and with the sea lying to the south rather than to the north-east. This conventional orientation has been adopted in the present volume.

<sup>3</sup> See on this period of the island’s history the numerous studies by Vivien Prigent, who devoted his doctoral thesis to it.

themselves representatives of the Abbassids in Ifrīqiya, and then—between 909 and the first third of the 11th century—into that of the Fatimids,<sup>4</sup> it was entrusted by the latter to the powerful family of the Kalbids, who governed the island in their name. The island was subsequently administered by a council, after the break-up of the Emirate (c. 1040). Finally, in 1072, Sicily was conquered by troops from the mainland led by the Hauteville.

A new chapter then began for Palermo, which saw it become the capital of the kingdom of Sicily, in 1130, under the new dynasty, which was Norman in origin, a status it retained until the end of the Middle Ages, even if the island would over time be integrated by turns into a number of different political dispensations, though no longer enjoying within them the primacy that it had known in the 12th century in the south of Italy.<sup>5</sup> Reattached to the empire of the Hohenstaufen from 1194,<sup>6</sup> the island became embroiled in the confrontation between Guelphs and Ghibellines, which crystallized as a long-lasting dispute between the Papacy and the Empire. After a decade of war, Sicily was subsumed in 1265–1266 into the Angevin kingdom. In actual fact, the brother of the king of France, Charles of Anjou, count of Anjou, of Maine, and of Provence, the Pope's ally, having been vested with power over Sicily by the latter, seized it and became its king, though not without Ghibelline resistance.

In 1282, the famous Sicilian Vespers,<sup>7</sup> a revolt unleashed by the Palermians against the French, brought the Angevin interlude<sup>8</sup> to a close, when the kingdom re-entered the Aragonese orbit,<sup>9</sup> under the rule of Peter III of Aragon. This date also marks Sicily's definitive exit from the southern

---

<sup>4</sup> This Shi'ite dynasty drove the Aghlabids from power and established in Ifrīqiya a new caliphate, rivalling the Abbassids, in 909. From 969, the caliphal capital was moved to the new Egyptian foundation of Cairo.

<sup>5</sup> On the period of the Hauteville and the Hohenstaufen see Salvatore Tramontana, *La monarchia normanna e sveva*, in Giuseppe Galasso, ed., *Storia d'Italia* (Turin, 1983), III, pp. 435–810, subsequently published separately (Turin, 1986); Annliese Nef, *Conquérir et gouverner la Sicile islamique aux XI<sup>e</sup> et XII<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Rome, 2011) and, for Frederick II, David Abulafia, *Frederick II. A Medieval Emperor* (London 1988).

<sup>6</sup> William II (1166–1189) died without a heir and the emperor Henry VI, who married Constance, the daughter of Roger II, then prevailed.

<sup>7</sup> Salvatore Tramontana, *Gli anni del vespro. L'immaginario, la cronaca, la storia* (Bari, 1989).

<sup>8</sup> Charles of Anjou and his descendants then retained the kingdom of Naples.

<sup>9</sup> In 1262, Constance, granddaughter of Frederick II had married Peter III of Aragon. This explains why the pro-Swabians and anti-Angevins in exile would before long gravitate to Barcelona.

Italian context which had been its chief point of reference since 1130.<sup>10</sup> The rejection of the agreement reached in 1295 between the Papacy and the Angevins on the one hand and James II of Aragon, son of Peter III, on the other—a settlement which ceded Sicily to the former in exchange for the investiture of Sardinia and Corsica to the king of Aragon—led the kingdom of Sicily to proclaim itself independent under the rule of Frederick III, brother of James and the latter's lieutenant in Sicily. This situation then left the island facing an alliance consisting of the Papacy, the Angevins and the Aragonese. In 1302, the peace of Caltabellotta, while recognising the three-cornered kingdom and the rule of Frederick III, stipulated that at his death the island should come under pontifical authority.

The dawning century was marked on the one hand by the war pitting the Angevins of Naples against the Aragonese branch of Sicily, and on the other by an internal conflict between the “Catalan party,” identified with this latter, which established the island's capital in Catania in 1353, and the “Latin party,” embodied by the Chiaromonte, a powerful family from Palermo aligned with the Ghibellines. After the death of Frederick IV, in 1377, there emerged from a period of anarchy a quadruple vicariate which pretended to administer the island in the name of the infant Maria, who ruled only in name and was abducted by the king of Aragon so that she might be married to the infant Martin in 1379. This latter landed on the island at the head of an army in 1392, in order to regain control of it, which he did in 1398. After the death of Martin, without an heir, in 1409,

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<sup>10</sup> For the 14th–15th centuries, see Henri Bresc, *Un monde méditerranéen: économie et société en Sicile (1300–1460)* (Paris, Rome and Palermo, 1986); Pietro Corrao, *Governare un regno. Potere, società e istituzioni in sicilia fra Trecento e Quattrocento* (Naples, 1991) and Igor Mineo, *Nobiltà di Stato. Famiglie e identità aristocratiche nel tardo medioevo. La Sicilia* (Rome, 2001). For the economic dimension, see Stephan R. Epstein, *An Island for itself. Economic development and social transformation in late medieval Sicily*, Past and Present Publications Series (Cambridge, 1992) and the edition revised for the translation and published under the title *Potere e mercati in Sicilia. Secoli XIII–XVI* (Turin, 1996). More specifically on the cities of Sicily, Fabrizio Titone, *Governments of the universities. Urban communities of Sicily in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries* (Turnhout, 2009), and on Palermo, Patrizia Sardina, *Palermo e i Chiaromonte: splendore e tramonto di una signoria. Potere nobiliare, ceti dirigenti e società tra XIV e XV secolo* (Caltanissetta and Rome, 2003). See also the introductions to the twelve volumes of the series of the *Acta Curie felicis urbis Panormi* (Palermo, 1982–1999), an edition of the registers held at the Archivio Storico Comunale which cover the years 1274–1410. On this last point: Beatrice Pasciuta, “Scritture giudiziarie e scritture amministrative: la cancelleria cittadina a Palermo nel XIV secolo,” in Isabella Lazzarini, ed., *Scritture e potere. Pratiche documentarie e forme di governo nell'Italia tardomedievale (XIV–XV secolo)*, *Reti Medievali Rivista* (<http://www.retimedievali.it>), 9 (2008/1) and Marcello Moscone, *Notai e giudici cittadini dai documenti palermitani di età aragonese (1282–1391)* (Palermo, 2008).

and then that of his father, Martin II, who had succeeded him, a dynastic crisis in Catalonia led to a Catalan viceroy assuming control of the island from 1412, despite some resistance.

The king of Aragon, Alfonso V the Magnanimous (1416–1458), used the island, subject to harsh taxation but enjoying a degree of political autonomy, as a base for his conquest of the kingdom of Naples, completed in 1443. He had to confront the revolt of Palermo in 1450. At his death, his brother, John II (1458–1479), succeeded him.

Ferdinand, the second son of John II and latterly—after the death of his half brother, in 1461—his heir, married the future Isabella I of Castile in 1469. From 1474 he was therefore king of Castile and Leon, ruling under the name of Ferdinand V. In 1479 he became sovereign of both Aragon and Sicily. In 1504 he would lay hands upon the kingdom of Naples, held up until then by his cousin, Ferdinand the Catholic, whose reign therefore opened a new phase in the history of Sicily. He was also responsible, together with his wife Isabella, for the introduction of the Spanish Inquisition into Palermo in 1487, and for the expulsion of the Jews from Sicily in 1492.

Throughout this long timespan the history of Palermo is unevenly documented in the sources, which also vary markedly in quantity and quality from period to period.<sup>11</sup> No archival documents were preserved for the Byzantine and Islamic periods; one has therefore to draw upon data derived from literary sources or from epigraphy, sigillography (for Byzantium), numismatics and archaeology. A further regional characteristic, of the twelfth century documentation above all, is the preservation of notarial acts written in Arabic and in Greek in ecclesiastical records conserved in the Archivio di Stato di Palermo. As for subsequent periods, written sources are more varied, although the paucity of communal archival records compared with Northern Italian cities, a natural consequence of differences in the respective institutional frameworks, has been emphasised. The archives of the central administrative offices are thus fundamental for the medieval history of Palermo. Prior to the fourteenth century, Latin notarial registers are likewise almost non-existent (the documents preserved are in the ecclesiastical records). Finally, note should be taken of the paucity of the documentation for the thirteenth century,

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<sup>11</sup> The nature and repartition of the sources is an issue tackled by the bibliography detailed in the note 10.

a dearth due in particular to the destruction suffered by the archives in Naples during World War II.

Taking into account these specificities, the contributors to the present volume have set out to recast the medieval history of Palermo.

#### FOR A NEW HISTORY OF MEDIEVAL PALERMO

In the light of this brief chronological resumé, one can readily understand why the medieval history of Palermo is too often described as a sequence of periods of foreign domination that both gave rise to a rich cultural synthesis and led to a sort of eternal urban subjection to a monarchical power, whose frame of reference was usually extra-insular, all the more so given that the emblem of political modernity, the medieval Italian commune, is presumed never to have existed there. Cultural diversity and a lack of political maturity would seem to have gone hand in hand, according to this widely accepted viewpoint.

Such stereotyped images have been undermined by the recent historiography, and histories of Palermo are indeed not rare;<sup>12</sup> high quality syntheses<sup>13</sup> have been published recently in Italian.<sup>14</sup> Rather than imitate them, we have attempted something quite different. The more innovative works on Palermo are predominantly concerned with the second half of the Middle Ages and place the emphasis above all on social, institutional and political logics, precisely in order to rectify the misleading notions summarised in the preceding paragraph. By taking into account research in progress, we have endeavoured to prolong this historiographical renewal by extending it to other as yet neglected domains.

Thus, to begin with, we have deliberately accorded the same importance to the different periods succeeding one another during the Middle Ages: traditionally, in fact, far less attention has been paid to the five first centuries (6th–mid-11th century) than to the last (mid-11th–15th century). We have therefore allotted the former more space than is usually the case,

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<sup>12</sup> Geneviève Bresc-Bautier and Henri Bresc, ed., *Palerme 1070–1492. Mosaïque de peuples, nation rebelle: la naissance violente de l'identité sicilienne* (Paris, 1993).

<sup>13</sup> See the *Storia di Palermo*, edited by Rosario La Duca, several volumes of which have appeared since 1999, and which retrace the history of the city from its origins.

<sup>14</sup> One of the main aims of the present publication was to render the latest research on the subject accessible to English readers.



and this is particularly true for the Islamic period,<sup>15</sup> which saw Palermo become the island's capital in place of Syracuse. Furthermore, in order not to refer time and time again to the same dynastic divisions, which in certain spheres are anyway not relevant, use has been made of transversal thematic approaches, analysing a particular aspect over several centuries, so as to follow developments across the very long term.

Without excluding economic, political and social questions,<sup>16</sup> which have been successfully tackled in the past,<sup>17</sup> considerable scope has been given to cultural<sup>18</sup> and religious<sup>19</sup> history, areas neglected in recent years in the Palermitan context. The religious development of Palermo in the Middle Ages has still in fact been little studied<sup>20</sup> and cultural history at once clings to outmoded myths and neglects discoveries that indicate a veritable dynamism, so much at odds is it with the stereotyped image purveyed in vast swathes of the secondary literature.<sup>21</sup> Likewise, if the history of architecture and art is for its part rarely forgotten when the city is evoked,<sup>22</sup> though without always taking into account the most recent contributions, that of the knowledge of languages and of texts is less often in the place of honour, and recent syntheses are lacking.

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<sup>15</sup> Vivien Prigent thus tackles the Byzantine period, while Alessandra Bagnera, Mirella Cassarino and Annliese Nef address the Islamic period.

<sup>16</sup> Chapters by Gian Luca Borghese, Henri Bresc, Igor Mineo, Annliese Nef, and Laura Sciascia.

<sup>17</sup> I refer the reader here to the individual bibliographies attached to specific chapters.

<sup>18</sup> As with the chapters by Mirella Cassarino, Benoît Grévin and Giuseppe Mandalà.

<sup>19</sup> As once again with the chapter by Mirella Cassarino, and that by Henri Bresc on the religious evolution of the city.

<sup>20</sup> The emphasis has generally been on the topographic aspect, see *Contrade e chiese nella palermo medievale* (Palermo, 1999). A notable exception is provided by the works of Francesco Lo Piccolo: ed., Antonio Mongitore, *Storia delle chiese di Palermo: i conventi* (Palermo, 2009); *Aspetti e problemi dell'associazionismo laicale a Palermo tra medioevo ed età moderna* (Palermo, 1999).

<sup>21</sup> In this regard the study by Karla Mallette, *The Kingdom of Sicily: 1100–1250. A Literary History* (Philadelphia, 2005) is not altogether satisfactory.

<sup>22</sup> Amongst the great number of works, see the high quality guide of Cesare De Seta, Maria Antonietta Spadaro and Sergio Troisi, *Palermo, città d'arte. Guida ai monumenti di Palermo e Monreale* (Palermo, 1999); but also David Knipp, ed., *Art and form in Norman Sicily (Proceedings of an International Conference, Rome, 6–7 december 2002)* (Munich, 2005); Maria Andaloro, ed., *Nobiles Officinae. Perle, filigrane e trame di seta dal Palazzo Reale di Palermo. II. Saggi*, (Catania, 2006); numerous articles in Mario Re and Cristina Rognoni, ed., *Byzantino-Sicula V. Giorgio di Antiochia; l'arte della politica in Sicilia nel XII secolo tra Bisanzio e l'Islam (Atti del convegno internazionale, Palermo, 19–20 avril 2007)* (Palermo, 2009) and the recent study by Emanuela Garofalo and Marco Rosario Nobile, *Palermo e il gotico* (Palermo, 2007).

Furthermore, even though the history of the urban topography of Palermo has a venerable pedigree,<sup>23</sup> and though this approach has been sustained uninterruptedly across so many centuries,<sup>24</sup> it is still more often employed by archaeologists than by other researchers, and in publications that are scattered and difficult for non-specialists to find. We have therefore sought to take stock of this dimension, at any rate for the periods that are most striking from this point of view (Islamic domination<sup>25</sup> and the rule of the Hauteville). It was a question not only of retracing a sustained architectural policy,<sup>26</sup> but also of bringing the materiality of the city into full view.<sup>27</sup>

Finally, we have sought to open up a more general perspective as regards the cities of Sicily by emphasising the degree to which, notwithstanding what has already been said on this theme, Sicilian townsmen and citizens have loomed larger in the political and institutional life of these latter than historians have tended to suppose.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> See, in particular, Vincenzo Di Giovanni, *La topografia antica di Palermo dal secolo X al XV*, I–II (Palermo, 1889–90).

<sup>24</sup> Henri Bresc, “L’espace public à Palerme,” in Jacques Heers, ed., *Fortifications, portes de villes, places publiques dans le monde méditerranéen* (Paris, 1984), pp. 41–65; Id., “Filologia urbana: Palermo dai Normanni agli aragonesi,” *Incontri Meridionali*, III series, 1–2 (1981), 5–41 and “In ruga que arabice dicitur zucac: Les rues de Palerme (1070–1460),” in *Le paysage urbain au Moyen Age (Actes du XI<sup>e</sup> Congrès de la SHMESP, Lyon, 1980)* (Lyons, 1981), pp. 155–86; Franco D’Angelo, *La città di Palermo nel Medioevo* (Palermo, 2002); Marina Scarlata, “Configurazione urbana e habitat a Palermo tra XII e XIII secolo,” in Rosario La Duca, ed., *Storia di Palermo III* (Palermo, 2003), pp. 133–81 and Elena Pezzini, “Un tratto della cinta muraria della città di Palermo,” *MEFRM* 110/2 (1998), 719–71 and “Alcuni dati sull’uso della terra nell’architettura medievale a Palermo: fonti documentarie e testimonianze materiali,” in *III Congresso Nazionale di Archeologia Medievale* (Salerno, 2003), pp. 624–28.

<sup>25</sup> Chapter by Alessandra Bagnera.

<sup>26</sup> Chapter by Rosa Di Liberto.

<sup>27</sup> Chapter by Elena Pezzini.

<sup>28</sup> Chapter by Fabrizio Titone.



FROM AN EMPIRE TO ANOTHER EMPIRE (VITH-XITH)



## PALERMO IN THE EASTERN ROMAN EMPIRE

Vivien Prigent

### FROM ONE BOAT TO ANOTHER

Palermo became part of the Byzantine empire in 535, through the swift conquest of Sicily, then part of the Ostrogothic kingdom of Italy, by the general Belisarius. The attack had two pretexts: a dispute regarding the legitimate rights of the emperor, heir by conquest to the Vandal kings, to possess the Sicilian city of Lilibeo, and the declared intention to avenge Queen Amalasantha, who had been ousted and killed by her cousin Theodatus.<sup>1</sup>

Belisarius advanced with unexpected ease,<sup>2</sup> due to the absence of Germanic troops in this rich but outlying province.<sup>3</sup> Palermo, for its part, was furnished with a garrison, but the latter refused to hand over its weapons and took shelter behind the city's fortifications. Faced with an audacious strategy of the Byzantine general, the Ostrogoths were however forced to surrender: "Belisarius... ordered the fleet to sail into the harbour, which extended right up to the wall (...). Now when the ships had anchored there, it was seen that the masts were higher than the parapet. Straightway, therefore, he filled all the small boats of the ships with bowmen, and hoisted them to the tops of the masts. And when from these boats the enemy were shot at from above, they fell into such an irresistible fear that they immediately delivered Panormo to Belisarius by surrender."<sup>4</sup>

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#### Abbreviations

*PCBE*: *Prosopographie Chrétienne du Bas-Empire*, 2, 1, *Italie*, eds. Charles and Luce Pietri (Rome, 1999).

*PmbZ*: *Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit*, ed. Friedhelm Winkelmann (Berlin, 2000).

*Registrum*: Gregory the Great, *Registrum Epistularum sancti Gregorii Magni*, ed. Dag Norberg, *Corpus Christianorum, series latina* 140 et 140A (Turnhout, 1982).

<sup>1</sup> Procopius, *History of the Wars*, ed. and tr. Henry B. Dewing (London, 1961–62), 5.3.16–29 et 5.4.30–31.

<sup>2</sup> The emperor's instructions had been to disembark on some pretext or other, but only to attack if there appeared to be a real chance of success; if not, the troops should re-embark and continue towards their official destination, Carthage, *ibid.*, 5.5.6–7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.16.17–18.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.5.13–16.

Such methods of attack are mentioned even in Antiquity and the Byzantines of the early Middle Ages are known to have employed them, but in the form of assault platforms fashioned from long oars hoisted high up on the masts of ships. The ship then served as a siege tower.<sup>5</sup>

Aside from its spectacular character, the conquest of Palermo by Belisarius, by placing the emphasis upon missile weapons, served to highlight the consequences of the lack of a genuine archery tradition among the Germanic warriors.<sup>6</sup> They laid down their weapons, judging it impossible to resist a possible assault on the city walls by the remaining fighting crew. According to Procopius, this structural weakness would cost them the war and with it their Italian kingdom.<sup>7</sup>

Interesting though the circumstances surrounding this conquest of Palermo may have been, we are obliged to acknowledge that the city immediately fell back into obscurity, making only a brief reappearance in the literary sources on the occasion of the crisis which led to its conquest by the Muslim armies. We know that the invasion of the island began in the guise of a civil war unleashed because the emperor Michael III wished to be rid of one of his former supporters, the tourmach Euphemios.<sup>8</sup> The latter managed to eliminate the titular governor, with the assistance of two other officers, a certain Balata, about whom we know almost nothing, and the latter's cousin, Michael, governor of Palermo. The troops commanded by the two cousins then brushed aside Euphemios, but when he returned, backed by the Aghlabid forces from Ifrīqiya, they were no match for him, and the troops from Palermo suffered a crushing defeat.<sup>9</sup> This sequence of battles fought by troops from the western city go some way

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<sup>5</sup> In the 10th century, the *Parangelmata poliorkêtika* mentions this type of assault, descended from the *Peri mēchanēmatôn*, of the 2nd century AD. This form of attack was attempted on various occasions, for example, during the siege of Constantinople in 717, and likewise against Thessaloniki in 904. See John H. Pryor and Elizabeth Jeffreys, *The Age of the dromon: the Byzantine navy, ca. 500–1204* (Leiden, 2006), pp. 64, 177, 225 et p. 324, for a 10th century illustration representing such constructions.

<sup>6</sup> The modes of combat employed by the "blond peoples" are described in the Emperor Maurice's *Strategikon*. See *Das Strategikon des Maurikios*, ed. George T. Dennis, *Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae* (Vienna, 1981), 11.3.

<sup>7</sup> Procopius attributed the inability of the Goths to prevail during the siege of Rome to Belisarius's mounted archers (Procopius, *History of the Wars*, 5.27.26–29). Likewise, it was the superiority of the Byzantine archers which guaranteed the victory of Narses over Totila (*Ibid.*, 8.32.6–10).

<sup>8</sup> Vivien Prigent, "La carrière du tourmarque Euphémios, Basileus des Romains," in André Jacob, Jean-Marie Martin, Ghislaine Noyé, eds., *Histoire et culture dans l'Italie byzantine*, Collection de l'École française de Rome 363 (Rome, 2006), pp. 279–317.

<sup>9</sup> Ibn al-Athīr, *BAS* it., 1: 367.

towards explaining the decision of the Arabo-Muslims to establish their bridgehead there, after their setback before Syracuse.<sup>10</sup> The city could justifiably seem to be both a key element in the control of the island and particularly weakened at this precise point in the development of the balance of forces. The siege of Palermo, very probably begun in August 830,<sup>11</sup> lasted despite everything for a whole year, leading to a drastic reduction in the numbers of its inhabitants.<sup>12</sup> The city surrendered in the month of *rajab* 831 (14 August–12 September).<sup>13</sup> The surrender was negotiated by an individual whom Ibn al-Athīr identifies as the “lord” (*ṣāhib*) of the city, rather than using the more usual “patrikos,” as this same author does to refer to the majority of Byzantine officers in his chronicle. The *Gesta episcoporum Neapolitanorum* gives us good grounds for identifying him with a certain Simeon, who bore the title of spatharios,<sup>14</sup> a term which at this date no longer refers to any function but simply to an aulic honour. It was therefore probably a notable who negotiated, in concert with bishop Luke, also mentioned in the Neapolitan chronicle, the surrender of the city. Ought one to see this as a reflection of the relative autonomy enjoyed by Palermo since the death of Balata?<sup>15</sup> Be this as it may, when Simeon embarked, three hundred years of imperial domination over Palermo came to an end.

#### THE ROLE OF PALERMO WITHIN THE SICILIAN URBAN NETWORK

In order to assess Palermo’s influence upon the island we need to scrutinise its integration within the Sicilian urban system. The latter presented two strongly marked characteristics, namely, the extreme concentration

<sup>10</sup> The forces that had come from Africa laid siege to the city but to no avail. The epidemic which cost their leader his life forced them to retreat in the face of an imperial army sent to relieve Palermo, *ibid.* p. 367.

<sup>11</sup> Al-Nuwayrī, *BAS* it., 2: 119. This author mistakenly dates the end of the siege to 835.

<sup>12</sup> Even if the figure proposed by Ibn al-Athīr of three thousand survivors out of the seventy thousand persons alleged to be living in the city at the outbreak of hostilities may seem excessive, it does give us some idea of the sheer ferocity of the combat.

<sup>13</sup> Ibn al-Athīr, *BAS* it., 1: 369.

<sup>14</sup> *Gesta episcoporum Neapolitanorum*, ed. Georg Waitz, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica Scriptores Rerum Longobardorum Saec. VI–IX* (Hanover, 1878), § 54, p. 429.

<sup>15</sup> This latter was apparently not among those slain when the Palermitan troops were defeated in front of Syracuse in 828, but probably died during the siege of Palermo. One wonders whether the ambiguous loyalty of Palermo may go some way towards explaining the wait-and-see policy of the imperial forces, which, despite the presence of reinforcements from Constantinople, seem not to have made any effort to relieve Palermo.



of the towns along the coasts, and the existence of two principal urban clusters. The first was the axis of the straits of Messina, featuring Syracuse, Catania and Messina; the second, the north-western “triangle,” consisting of Termini, Palermo, Carini and Lilibeo.<sup>16</sup> Conversely, the southern and northern zones appear to have been under-urbanised. Under Roman domination, the western triangle was extremely dynamic,<sup>17</sup> a fact borne out by, for example, the high concentration of mentions of senators within this zone,<sup>18</sup> but it seems to have lost momentum from the end of Antiquity. This phenomenon was very probably due to the combined impact of the partial decline of the Rome-Carthage commercial axis after the Vandal conquest of North Africa,<sup>19</sup> of maritime raids launched by the new Germanic masters of Tunisia,<sup>20</sup> and of seismic phenomena.<sup>21</sup>

Palermo, however, played its cards relatively well. The most obvious signs of decline in fact were perceptible in the other urban components of the triangle, whose crisis might well have worked in its favour. The clearest case was that of Termini, which, though in fact mentioned by

<sup>16</sup> On the importance of this urban triangle in the early Empire, Andrea Giardina, “Il quadro storico: Palermo da Augusto a Gregorio Magno”, *Kokalos* 33 (1987), 231–44.

<sup>17</sup> On this point, see Concetta Molè Ventura, “Dinamiche di trasformazione nelle città della Sicilia orientale tardoantica,” in *Atti del IX congresso internazionale di Studi sulla Sicilia antica*, *Kokalos* 43–44 (1997–1998), vol. I-1, 153–190, which also contains a bibliography. The proceedings of a colloquium devoted to the history of Palermo at the end of Antiquity were published in the review *Kokalos* in 1987. According to Roger J. A. Wilson, “Towns of Sicily during the Roman Empire,” in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II, 11, 1: *Sizilien und Sardinien* (Berlin, 1988), pp. 153–58, which takes bearings amongst the archaeological sources, Palermo was the least well-known of the Roman Sicilian cities.

<sup>18</sup> Up until the 3rd century, the available information regarding the presence of senators in Sicily is concentrated in a Lilibeo-Palermo-Termini Imerese triangle; cf. Giacomo Manganaro, “I senatori di Sicilia e il problema del latifundio,” in *Epigrafia e ordine senatorio*, I, *Tituli* 5 (1982), 369–85 and the bibliographical synthesis of Livia Bivona, *Epigrafia latina*, *Kokalos* 43–44 (1997–1998), vol. I-2, 613–24.

<sup>19</sup> On this point see Simon J. Keay, *Late Roman Amphorae in the Western Mediterranean. A Typology and Economic Study: the Catalan Evidence*, BAR International Series 196 (Oxford, 1984), pp. 112–18. The discoveries in the Crypta Balbi have however enabled us to qualify still further this decline in African imports, see in particular Simon J. Keay, “African Amphorae,” in Lucia Sagui, ed., *La ceramica in Italia, VI–VII sec., Atti del convegno in onore di J. Hayes, British School-American Academy, Rome (11–13 mai 1995)*, Biblioteca di archeologia medievale 14 (Florence, 1998), pp. 141–56, and in the same volume Stefano Tortorella, “La sigillata Africana in Italia nel VI e nel VII secolo d.C.: problemi di cronologia e distribuzione,” pp. 41–70.

<sup>20</sup> Biagio Saitta, “La Sicilia tra incursioni vandaliche e dominazione ostrogotica,” *Quaderni Catanesi di studi classici e medievali* 9 (1987), 363–417.

<sup>21</sup> Giardina, *Quadro storico*, pp. 241–46.

George of Cyprus,<sup>22</sup> had still not acceded to episcopal status at the end of the 6th century, despite the legislative measures to this effect taken by the Emperor Zeno.<sup>23</sup> Thus, even if it was larger than Palermo in the imperial epoch, Termini would seem to have suffered a marked decline at the end of Antiquity.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, the letters of Gregory the Great touch upon the decline of Carini,<sup>25</sup> subject to the authority of bishop Boniface of Reggio.<sup>26</sup> The local Church survived despite everything, since the last holder of the office subscribed to the acts of the Council of Nicea II,<sup>27</sup> but the evidence of the lead seal, recently recovered from a sumptuous building consequently identified as the episcopal palace of Carini, should not be taken to identify an incumbent of this see, but a bishop of Palermo.<sup>28</sup> Thus, the small city gradually entered the orbit of its more dynamic neighbour, prior to disappearing altogether, probably during the opening decades of Islamic domination.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Ernst Honigmann, *Le Synekdemòs d'Hiéroklos et l'opuscule géographique de Georges de Chypre*, text, introduction and commentary (Brussels 1939), p. 49. No bishop of Termini is mentioned in the correspondence of Gregory the Great, the sheer richness of which, especially as regards relations with bishops on the island, allows us to proceed on a firm foundation.

<sup>23</sup> Arnold H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire: A Social, Economic and Administrative Survey (284–602)* (Oxford, 1964), p. 877 and n. 8.

<sup>24</sup> Wilson, "Towns of Sicily," p. 143 n. 177: 60 hectares. The fate of Termini under the Late Empire is treated at length in Oscar Belvedere *et alii*, *Termini Imerese. Ricerche di topografia e di archeologia urbana* (Palermo, 1993).

<sup>25</sup> To judge by these letters, the city was all but abandoned: see *Registrum*. See the clarification of the historiographical debate regarding this city in Caterina Greco, Irina Garofano and Fabiola Ardizzone, "Nuove indagini archeologiche nel territorio di Carini," *Kokalos* 43–44 (1997–1998), vol. II-1, p. 648, n. 9. See also Jeffrey Richards, *Consul of God. The Life and Times of Gregory the Great* (London, 1980), pp. 157–58.

<sup>26</sup> A merger with Palermo was doubtless not thought to be desirable, given Gregory's deep-seated conviction that Victor, the city's bishop, was incompetent, see *infra*. Vera von Falkenhausen has however proposed that the see placed under the authority of Boniface of Reggio be identified with the *Ecclesia Mystiensis*, a Calabrian bishopric devastated during the Lombard wars: Vera von Falkenhausen, "Ecclesia Myriensis oppure Ecclesia Mystiensis?", *Archivio Storico per la Calabria e la Lucania* 55 (1988), pp. 54–55. This hypothesis, which assumes a major corruption in the manuscript tradition, cannot be entirely ruled out and would indeed resolve most of the problems.

<sup>27</sup> We know of three bishops of Carini during the period of Byzantine domination, namely, Barbarus, attested in 602: *PCBE*, II, Barbarus 3, pp. 254–55; John, a signatory of the synod Council of Latran: *PmbZ*, 3403; and Constantine, a Council Father at Nicaea II (*PmbZ*, 3843).

<sup>28</sup> A second seal featuring this same monogram has recently been identified in the Manganaro collection, see my note in *Studies in Byzantine Sigillography* 10 on the reading of Giacomo Manganaro, "Sigilli diplomatici bizantini in Sicilia," *Jahrbuch für Numismatik und Geldgeschichte* 53–54 (2003/2004), 73–90.

<sup>29</sup> The see is absent from the episcopal list of 907, unless we accept the rash hypothesis of J. Darrouzès, who seeks to identify Carini with the mysterious see of Kronion:

A somewhat similar development may be glimpsed in Lilibeo. The latter seems to have retained its episcopal rank throughout the Byzantine period, although it disappeared more or less from the non-normative sources. Lilibeo was, moreover, the only city mentioned by George of Cyprus whose ancient name was supplanted by an Arabic one, that is, Marsā 'Alī. The city very probably never recovered from its sack at the hands of the Vandals,<sup>30</sup> and after it had been handed over to them Lilibeo was sundered from its hinterland.<sup>31</sup> On the eve of the Conquest, the queen of the Goths declared that it was "a rock not worth a piece of silver."<sup>32</sup> At the time of Gregory the Great, Lilibeo's ancient civic traditions were no longer maintained, for want of funds<sup>33</sup> and the local recruitment of bishops diminished: at the end of the 6th century, Decius was a foreigner to the city,<sup>34</sup> just as his predecessor, Theodore, had probably been.<sup>35</sup> The underlying cause of the city's decline may have lain in the silting up of its port, since from Roman times it was bounded to both the north and the south by deep sandbanks.<sup>36</sup> It has moreover been argued that the Severuses' interest in Palermo arose out of their concern to develop an alternative stopping-place on the route from Africa to Rome.<sup>37</sup>

Finally, I will conclude by raising the question of the extension of the bishop of Palermo's authority along the island's north coast. In fact, at the time of the imperial conquest and up until at least the end of the 6th century, no bishopric could second Palermo's influence in this area

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Jean Darrouzès, *Notitiae Episcopatum Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae*, Géographie ecclésiastique de l'empire byzantin 1 (Paris, 1981), p. 278, critical apparatus for line 278.

<sup>30</sup> The sheer violence of the attacks is documented by the coming to light of strata indicating destruction by fire in various parts of the city; we know of no inscriptions subsequent to this attack, and yet tombs are located within the city walls; Wilson, "Towns of Sicily," pp. 166–67; Enrico Caruso, "Lilibeo-Marsala: le fortificazione di età punica e medievale," in Alessandro Corretti, ed., *Atti delle Quarte Giornate Internazionali di Studi sull'Area Elima, Erice, 1–4 dicembre 2000*, (Pisa, 2003), pp. 171–207.

<sup>31</sup> On the marriage of Amalafriada, see, for example, Charles Courtois, *Les Vandales et l'Afrique* (Paris, 1955), p. 401 and n. 38; Lilibeo may perhaps have retained its authority over its territory for as much as four miles, to judge by an inscription mentioning *Fines inter Vandalos et (Go)thos... IIII* (CIL, X, 7232).

<sup>32</sup> Procopius, *History of the Wars*, V, 3, 27, p. 30.

<sup>33</sup> *Registrum*, IX, 199 from July 599; this problem may perhaps have been evoked by the pope as early as September 595, *Registrum*, VI, 13.

<sup>34</sup> *Registrum*, VI, 13.

<sup>35</sup> The dispute over his inheritance set a Syracusan doctor at odds with the Church of Melitene.

<sup>36</sup> Caruso, "Lilibeo-Marsala," pp. 171–72.

<sup>37</sup> Giardina, "Quadro storico," p. 239. See also Livia Bivona, "Panormo romana in età imperiale. La documentazione epigrafica," *Kokalos* 33 (1987), 257–70, pp. 262–63.

as far as Tindari. The latter was in fact a city of minor importance, and the influence of the bishop of Palermo probably extended as far as the frontiers of its diocese.

The 6th and 7th centuries thus found Palermo enjoying a very clear predominance over a truly vast territory, a fact that helps to account for the rebalancing evident subsequently. Indeed, several new bishoprics emerged in the course of the 7th to 8th century in the zone of influence that the present capital of Sicily had been able to carve out in the west of the island, the authorities very probably having felt the need to rebalance the island's urban and episcopal network. Thus, I would first of all cite the foundation of a bishopric at Termini, immediately to the east. The see is first attested when its bishop, Paschalis, attended the Roman council of 649.<sup>38</sup> This foundation occurred in the first half of the 7th century and should be linked with the rise in Sicilian agricultural production, the city's territory seeming to have experienced fairly prosperous agricultural activity during the late Empire.<sup>39</sup> Further to the east along the same northern littoral, the bishopric of Cefalù was founded in the 8th century, probably in the context of the reform of the ecclesiastical jurisdictions occurring during the reign of Leo III.<sup>40</sup> This creation reflected the city's pivotal strategic role in this period.<sup>41</sup> Finally, to the south-west of Palermo, the imperial authorities raised the town of Trapani to the status

<sup>38</sup> *Concilium Lateranense a. 649 celebratum*, ed. Rudolf Riedinger, *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* 2-1 (Berlin, 1984), p. 6, l. 17. Again, in 680, there is mention of an incumbent of the see, John, *Concilium universale Constantinopolitanum tertium*, ed. Rudolf Riedinger, *Acta Conciliorum oecumenicorum* 2-2 (Berlin, 1990), p. 146, l. 19. The incumbent's absence from Nicaea II should not be taken to mean that the city was in eclipse in the 8th century, since we know of at least one contemporary seal of a bishop of Termini, see Vitalien Laurent, *Le corpus des sceaux de l'empire byzantin*, V, 1-3, *L'Église* (Paris, 1963), 901. There is nothing extraordinary about the incumbent not having gone to Constantinople in 787.

<sup>39</sup> For the development of the territory of Termini, see Oscar Belvedere, "L'evoluzione storica del territorio imerese dalla fondazione della colonia al periodo tardo-antico," in Oscar Belvedere *et alii*, *Himera III, prospezione archeologica nel territorio* (Rome, 2002) and Rosa Maria Cucco, "Due insediamenti di età romana nel territorio ad est del fiume Imera," *Kokalos* 41 (1995), 139-182.

<sup>40</sup> The episcopal notices are lists of episcopal sees subject to the authority of the patriarchate of Constantinople. It is necessary to handle such sources with care since they are rarely official documents, but more often aides-mémoires of provincial episcopal chancelleries, which may well not have been completely up to date, see the introduction by Darrouzès, *Notitiae Episcopatum Ecclesiae*, p. 242, l. 625. For the date of notice 3, Vivien Prigent, "Les évêchés byzantins de la Calabre septentrionale," *MEFRM* 114-2 (2002), 931-953.

<sup>41</sup> The see is already mentioned in notice 2, but the testimony of this text needs to be handled with care. For the city's strategic role, Vivien Prigent, "Topotèrètes de Sicile et de Calabre aux VIII<sup>e</sup>-IX<sup>e</sup> siècles," *Studies in Byzantine Sigillography* 9 (2006), 145-158.

of bishopric. This see does not appear in the official lists of bishoprics prior to the beginning of the 10th century. However, one can hardly credit the notion that the foundation occurred under Muslim domination, and we must therefore date it to the years 750–820,<sup>42</sup> and tie it perhaps to the decline of Lilibeo described above.

This brief survey should help us to understand the development of Palermo as a trading centre in the context of the Sicilian urban network. The city was better able than its rivals of the north-western “triangle” to resist the developments affecting this zone at the end of Antiquity. Its sphere of influence very probably then extended over the whole of the west of the island, whose other sees were in a parlous state. The swaggering demeanour of the Palermitan bishops, reflected in Gregory the Great’s correspondence, is more readily understood in this context, even if we can do no more than posit this as a hypothesis. Thus, Victor of Palermo is invariably shown in a bad light, being charged with issuing an illicit excommunication,<sup>43</sup> accused of failing to oversee the morality of the nunneries,<sup>44</sup> and condemned for abusing his powers in relation to the city’s Jewish community.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, he viewed the Roman pontiff’s calls to order with overweening disdain.<sup>46</sup> His successor, John, had to undertake to rescind his predecessor’s simoniac practices,<sup>47</sup> and it has rightly been stressed that in the letter by which Gregory the Great recognised the latter’s election, the pope thought it necessary to modify the usual form by enhancing it with a defence against any challenge to the pontifical will.<sup>48</sup> The range of responsibilities then held by the incumbent of the see of Palermo would, finally, be reflected in Gregory the Great’s decision

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<sup>42</sup> The *terminus post quem* is supplied by the absence of the see from notice 3. It has recently been argued that the *terminus post quem* should be in 787 (Ferdinando Maurici, “*Sicilia bizantina: il territorio della provincia di Trapani dal VI al IX secolo*,” *Atti delle Quarte Giornate Internazionali di Studi sull’Area Elima*, p. 894), but the cases of Cefalù, Termini and Tindari, three sees cited in notice 3 but not represented at Nicaea II, provide a salutary reminder of the dangers of applying the argument *a silentio* to the conciliar lists.

<sup>43</sup> *Registrum*, III, 27.

<sup>44</sup> *Registrum*, V, 4, dated September 594.

<sup>45</sup> *Registrum*, IX, 38, dated October 598.

<sup>46</sup> *Registrum*, IX, 38. I will revert below to Victor’s quarrels with the pope.

<sup>47</sup> *Registrum*, XIII, 45. In July 603, John, the new bishop of Palermo, had to undertake in the presence of his own clergy to restore the properties of the Church wrongfully occupied by foreigners.

<sup>48</sup> *Registrum*, XIII, 38, dated July 603, l. 6–7: “On this subject, we put you on your guard against anyone having the presumption to fail to show due reverence towards the apostolic see.” On this election and the possible role of Gregory the Great, *Consul of God*, pp. 153–54.

not to uphold the candidacy of his friend abbot Urbicus, whose undeniable spiritual qualities would not suffice him if called upon to answer to the demands of such onerous episcopal functions.<sup>49</sup>

This relative “apogée” belonged to the 6th to 7th centuries, before a new movement of urbanization, or at any rate of episcopal foundations, came to undermine this pre-eminence or, more realistically, to relieve the city of responsibilities exceeding its capacities. One could also ascribe to the relative decline of the Palermitan see the fact that Palermo did not develop a specific “civic” cult during this period. Whilst a hagiographic production of real quality dedicated to the glory of the great Sicilian cities developed (Gregory of Agrigento, Leo of Catania, Pancras of Taormina, Marcian of Syracuse, Beryl of Catania), no specific text honoured Palermo.<sup>50</sup> We can thus readily understand why Saint Agatha, whom the earliest texts hold to have been born in Palermo, should have been shifted towards Catania,<sup>51</sup> and the growing importance of the monasteries, as against that of the episcopal Church, could have had something to do with this phenomenon.

#### CIVIL AND MILITARY ADMINISTRATION

Given the paucity of relevant sources, we cannot hope to have more than a very rudimentary notion of the manner in which the city was administered by the imperial authorities. Palermo must have undergone the sort of development common to the major part of the cities in the Roman empire, characterised as it was by the disappearance of formal municipal institutions<sup>52</sup> and the diminishing sway of the town over the surrounding territory.<sup>53</sup> It is nevertheless impossible to reconstruct the process in any detail. Study of the imperial administration relies very heavily, perhaps too heavily, on the lead bullae left by Byzantine functionaries. Unfortunately, the history of the Sicilian museums’ collections of such objects explains the concentration of such objects in Palermo, without it always

<sup>49</sup> *Registrum*, XIII, 12, November 602.

<sup>50</sup> In a general fashion, Daniele Motta, *Percorsi dell’agiografia. Società e cultura nella Sicilia tardoantica e bizantina* (Catania, 2003).

<sup>51</sup> Lastly on this topic, Motta, *Percorsi*, pp. 76–80, with bibliography.

<sup>52</sup> The best synthesis is that of Abshalom Laniado, *Recherches sur les notables municipaux dans l’empire protobyzantin*, Monographies du Centre d’histoire et de civilisation de Byzance 13 (Paris, 2002).

<sup>53</sup> Mark Whittow, “Recent Research on the late-antique city in Asia Minor: the second half of the 6th c. revisited,” in Luke Lavan, ed., *Recent research in Late-antique urbanism* (Portsmouth, 2001), pp. 137–54.

being possible to ascertain their actual provenance. When using these seals to found a historical argument tied specifically to Palermo, it is necessary to tread lightly, although some points may be advanced.

The first point of any importance concerns the apparent longevity of the municipal curia of Palermo. Thus, as late as 602, Gregory the Great seems to testify to its survival by his addressing of a letter *clero, ordini et plebi consistenti Panormo*.<sup>54</sup> The laity of the city thus appears as divided into two distinct categories, the first of which, the *ordo*, corresponded to the *curiales*.<sup>55</sup> However, a study of the pontiff's letters in their entirety clearly indicates that the relatively numerous references to the *curiae*, whether through the *ordo* or in relation to the *acta municipalia*, a municipal institution for which the *curiales* were responsible, appear in letters employing a fixed form.<sup>56</sup> Nothing therefore indicates that they refer to still existing realities. At Naples, alongside formulaic letters also distinguishing the clergy, the *ordo* and the *plebs*, one finds, concerning the very same subjects and at the same dates, more informal missives mentioning only the clergy and the *nobiles*. A "socio-economic" definition of the elite is therefore substituted there for the juridical division of the lay population into two categories prevailing in Antiquity.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, the undeniably formulaic character of certain modes of address does not by itself immediately invalidate all these testimonies as to the possible survival of the *curiae*. Thus, at Ravenna, some testimonies, papyrological at an earlier date<sup>58</sup> and sphragistic at a later,<sup>59</sup> confirm the testimony of the

<sup>54</sup> *Registrum*, XIII, 15.

<sup>55</sup> Jones, *Later Roman Empire*, p. 918; Thomas S. Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers: Imperial Administration and Aristocratic Power in Byzantine Italy A. D. 554–900* (Rome, 1984), p. 166, seeks to identify the *ordo* with the *possessores*.

<sup>56</sup> Thus, in the first scenario, it is almost always a question of announcing to the population of a city the appointment of an episcopal visitor or of a bishop or else of urging it to elect a new bishop; in the second, we are concerned with documents linked to the foundation of an oratory. On this aspect of Gregory the Great's correspondence, see the introduction to *Opere di Gregorio Magno, Lettere*, trans. Vincenzo Recchia, *Bibliotheca Gregorii Magni* 5–1 (Rome, 1996–1999), pp. 12–13; also Dag Norberg, "Style personnel et style administratif dans le *Registrum Epistularum* de saint Grégoire le Grand," in *Grégoire le Grand (Colloque international, Chantilly, 15–19 sept. 1982)* (Paris, 1986), pp. 489–97.

<sup>57</sup> *Registrum*, II, 3; II, 8; X, 9; X, 19.

<sup>58</sup> On the survival of the curia at Ravenna, Frank M. Ausbüttel, "Die Curialen und Stadt-*magistrat Ravenna im späten 5. und 6. Jh.*," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 67 (1987), 207–214.

<sup>59</sup> The seal is in a very poor state of repair. Johann Peter Kirch, "Altchristliche Bleisiegel des Museo Nazionale zu Neapel," *Römische Quartalschrift für christliche Alterthumskunde und für Kirchengeschichte* 6 (1892), p. 326. A drawing of it may be found in Id., "Bulles," in *Dictionnaire d'antiquités chrétiennes et de liturgie*, II, p. 1342, fig. 1732.

*Registrum* regarding the survival of the *curia*. We must therefore proceed with care here. However, at the election of bishop Victor's successor, the pope addressed his privileged interlocutor, the patrikios Venantius, first of the aristocrats of Palermo, in order to ask him to induce the clergy and the people to send to Rome representatives responsible for electing the new bishop.<sup>60</sup> As in the Neapolitan case, when affairs were handled in a pragmatic fashion, all reference to the *ordo* disappears.<sup>61</sup> It will therefore be conceded, without it being possible to dispel every doubt, that at the end of the 6th century the curia was already no more than a memory. In Sicily, this disappearance of the municipal council was very probably related to the reform of modes of tax collection decreed in 537.<sup>62</sup>

All references to any urban magistracies likewise disappeared, although certain functions (*defensor*, *pater poleôs*) are attested elsewhere on the island, sometimes up until an astonishingly late date.<sup>63</sup> Once again, we must risk arguing *a silentio*. But, in this context, there is a clear indication as to what was going on. On several occasions, in fact, the pope brings up the establishment in Palermo of commissions of arbitration, a practice tending more and more often to be substituted for genuine judicial procedures, which were often too lengthy.<sup>64</sup> Thus, in October 598, the pope ordered the *defensor* in charge of the Palermitan patrimony of the Church of Rome to essay a reconciliation between a certain Ianuaria and three individuals who were trying to drive her off a landed property she had

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<sup>60</sup> *Registrum*, XIII, 12.

<sup>61</sup> The development is nonetheless less clear, since we lack letters specifically addressed to the *habitatores* of Palermo or to its *nobiles*.

<sup>62</sup> Vivien Prigent, "La Sicile byzantine, entre papes et empereurs (6<sup>ème</sup>–8<sup>ème</sup> siècle)", in David Engels, Lioba Geis et Michael Kleu, eds., *Zwischen Ideal und Wirklichkeit: Herrschaft auf Sizilien von der Antike bis zur Frühen Neuzeit* (Stuttgart, 2009), pp. 201–230.

<sup>63</sup> See in particular the seal of Sergius, father of the city, from the beginning of the 8th century, Vitalien Laurent, "Une source peu étudiée de l'histoire de la Sicile au haut Moyen-Âge: La sigillographie byzantine," in *Byzantino-Sicula*, Quaderni dell'Istituto Siciliano di Studi Bizantini e Neoellenici 2 (Palermo, 1966), pp. 22–50, p. 35. I would, however, discount the case of a *primus* who might have been equated with the *prôteuôn/principalis* of the proto-Byzantine period. This administrative chimera arose out of an erroneous reading (*Ibid.*, p. 38) of a seal belonging to George of Antioch, the prime minister of Roger II (Vivien Prigent, "Le sceau de l'archonte Georges: prôtos ou émir?", *Revue des Études byzantines* 59 [2001], 193–207).

<sup>64</sup> As regards this institution, see Prigent, "Papes et empereurs." We may therefore identify the recourse to elected judges with an arbitration procedure as it is defined by T. Ganos and P. van Minnen, implying the preliminary recognition before a notary by the two parties of the binding force of the final sentence, whose legal status would be recognised subsequently by the official courts; Traianos Gagos and Peter van Minnen, *Settling a dispute. Toward a Legal Anthropology of Late Antique Egypt* (Michigan, 1994), p. 32.



occupied for some years.<sup>65</sup> In case of failure, the pope decreed that these latter *iudices cum ea eligant*. The *defensor* was responsible for executing the sentence, a sign that this commission did not itself have any power of constraint. This particular case may have regarded the hinterland of Palermo, but not so the following one. For in June 598, it was the turn of Palermo's Jewish community to complain to the pope about bishop Victor,<sup>66</sup> and the pontifical letter explicitly mentions the *petitio* addressed to the pontiff, which Gregory the Great attaches to his own letter.<sup>67</sup> The complaints concerned the Church of Palermo's illegal seizure of synagogues, along with the adjoining *xenodochia* and gardens, belonging to the Jewish community. The pope ordered the bishop to abide by the laws. If there existed reasonable grounds for him to persist, the two parties should elect judges. In case of deadlock, the case would be transferred to Rome. These instructions went unheeded, for four months later another letter informs us that Victor of Palermo had blocked all possibility of restitution by consecrating the properties taken from his city's Jewish community. Having been informed that legality was not the strong point where certain aspects of the affair were concerned, the pope instructed his *defensor* to compel the bishop to pay the value at which two arbiters (the patrikios Venantius and abbot Urbicus) estimated the properties seized.<sup>68</sup> Finally, it is worth citing a third case, which brought on to the stage a very eminent personage, the *gloriosus magister militum* Maurentius. This latter called upon the pope to intervene in order to settle a case of rights over land in which he was at odds with the Church of Palermo.<sup>69</sup> The pontiff envisaged as a last resort employing *cognitores*, who would seem to be identical to the *iudices electi* featuring in the first two cases. These latter were indeed substituted for the municipal institutions which one would expect to see invoked in order to settle these disputes. Once again, the Justinian administrative norms of 537 very probably influenced this development: appeals being referred to distant Constantinople, it became necessary to avoid the official tribunals as much as possible.<sup>70</sup> Finally, these commissions of arbitration could have been tied in with provincial institutions through the agency of the local representatives of the praetor of Sicily.

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<sup>65</sup> *Registrum*, IX, 39.

<sup>66</sup> *Registrum*, VIII, 25.

<sup>67</sup> We obviously only have the text of the pontifical letter.

<sup>68</sup> *Registrum*, IX, 38. The petition is likewise mentioned there.

<sup>69</sup> *Registrum*, IX, 120.

<sup>70</sup> Prigent, "Papes et empereurs."

One thus encounters at Lilibeo the activities of the praetor's *loci servator*, whose responsibility it was to give a ruling, along with the bishop of the city, regarding the wrongdoing of a certain Boniface.<sup>71</sup> However, nothing expressly indicates that this was also the case in Palermo, and the legislation of Justinian I on several occasions condemned governors for interfering in the administration of cities in the guise of appointing such *loci servatores*.<sup>72</sup> It is nonetheless remarkable that the pope, who was always very mindful of legality, felt no need here to offer any further comment.

We know precious little about the upper echelons of the administration, and in particular about the possible presence of functionaries directly representing the central authorities. First of all, we would do well to discount the testimonies advanced in favour of the existence in Palermo of a *magister militum*, a high-ranking military official. Whilst it is true that the *gloriosus* Maurentius vied with bishop Victor of Palermo for the possession of a great estate,<sup>73</sup> this high-ranking functionary, *chartularius* and then *magister militum* responsible for the defence of Naples, did not stay in Palermo and was only associated with the city on this one occasion.<sup>74</sup> We are certainly concerned here with an absentee landowner, and his official prerogatives were not exercised in Sicily. The same is true of the *magister militum* Zittas, to whom the pope wrote in May 600.<sup>75</sup> The officer in question complained about the refusal of some *religiosa loca* from the region of Palermo to acquit themselves of certain obligations of a fiscal nature. Once again, the pontiff thought to settle the question *apud electos iudices*. This has been viewed as proof of the control exercised by the military authorities over the collection of taxes intended to maintain the garrisons on the island,<sup>76</sup> but this interpretation seems untenable.

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<sup>71</sup> *Registrum*, III, 49. Lellia Cracco Ruggini, "La Sicilia fra Roma e Bisanzio," in Rosario Romeo, ed., *Storia della Sicilia*, III, (Naples, 1980), p. 24.

<sup>72</sup> Cezary Kunderewicz, "Les topotèrètes dans les Nouvelles de Justinien et dans l'Égypte byzantine," *Journal of Juristic Papyrology* 14 (1962), 33–50.

<sup>73</sup> *Registrum*, IX, 120, dated February–April 599.

<sup>74</sup> *PCBE*, II, Maurentius, pp. 1433–35.

<sup>75</sup> *Registrum*, X, 10.

<sup>76</sup> *Registrum*, X, 10, n. 3; "It was a question of the close control exercised by the Byzantine military authorities over tax-collecting, the returns from which were by and large used to maintain the army garrisoned on the island...", as Nino Tamassia wrote in "La novella giustiniana 'De Praetore Siciliae,'" *Studio storico e giuridico*, in *Centenario della nascita di Michele Amari* (Palermo, 1910), I, pp. 304–331, pp. 329–30. See also Cracco Ruggini, "Storia della Sicilia," p. 125 n. 81, who emphasises the fiscal dimension but rejects the notion of the army being directly involved in the collection. She nevertheless sees in this affair some connection with the financing of the army. The analysis of the letter in André Guillou,

Not only would such a practice be wholly extraordinary,<sup>77</sup> but recourse to *iudices electi*, essentially responsible for settling local conflicts of a private nature,<sup>78</sup> is incompatible with the importance assumed by a refusal on the part of local religious institutions to honour their fiscal obligations to the army even when a functionary of the rank of *magister militum* was present. This interpretation in terms of a private conflict with private foundations more or less integrated<sup>79</sup> into the patrimony of the *magister militum* would therefore best explain the implicit reference to a fiscal question. Zittas was therefore not a *magister militum* from Palermo powerless to get those administered by him to pay their taxes, but an absentee landowner trying his hardest not to pay for others.

The information at our disposal for the subsequent period is hardly any richer. We know that the city had its own governor, because Michael, cousin of Balata, exercised the relevant functions. We should very probably regard him as the archon of Palermo, a functionary whose existence at the beginning of the 9th century is demonstrated by a seal which belonged to a certain Serge or George, archon of Palermo.<sup>80</sup> Palermo thus appears to have been the only city in the province of Calabria-Sicily to have had a governor of its own, a further confirmation of its intrinsic importance. Conversely, pinning down the functions covered by this vague title is no easy matter. Nonetheless, scholars generally agree that, within the imperial administration, the archons of port cities were involved not only in administering the town but also in commanding particular units of

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"La Sicile byzantine: état des recherches," *Byzantinische Forschungen* 5 (1977), pp. 100–101, leaves us perplexed.

<sup>77</sup> The laws preclude the direct involvement of the armed forces, otherwise than as a coercive instrument under instruction from the civil authorities, in the fiscal process. See, for example, Constantin Zuckerman, *Du village à l'empire. Autour du registre fiscal d'Aphroditô (525/526)*, Travaux et Mémoires du Centre de recherche d'histoire et de civilisation de Byzance, Monographies, 16 (Paris, 2004), p. 155 and pp. 191–92.

<sup>78</sup> Of course, the role of the monastic institutions in the provisioning of the military units, documented in the papyri, is beyond dispute: Jean Gascou, "P.Fouad 87: les monastères pachômiens et l'État byzantin," *Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale* 76 (1976), 157–184. It was a question of direct payments to those having rights to the fiscal resources required in the context of the annona.

<sup>79</sup> The private foundations continued to pay their taxes, John P. Thomas, *Private Religious Foundations in the Byzantine Empire*, *Dumbarton Oaks Studies* 24 (Washington DC, 1987), p. 57, p. 73 and pp. 80–83. There are numerous instances in Sicily of properties held in common, with, as a consequence, a shared fiscal responsibility.

<sup>80</sup> Antonino Salinas, "Sigilli diplomatici italo-greci," *Periodico di numismatica e sfragistica per la storia d'Italia* 6 (1874), pp. 96–98 and 216–18, n°28; seal from the Museo archeologico Paolo Orsi, numbered 6889 in the inventory, and the dating derives from my direct examination of the item.

the navy, even if in certain cases this double responsibility was bound to necessitate the concurrent exercise of the functions of archon and of *droungarios*.<sup>81</sup> Thus, Palermo may well have been, along with Syracuse, the main port of registry of the Byzantine fleet in Sicily.

Beyond the lacunae in our knowledge regarding the administration of Byzantine Palermo, the weakness of the formal civil and military institutions prompts us to suppose that here as elsewhere, on the margins of the social power of the aristocracy, the principal structured authority was that of the bishop.<sup>82</sup>

### THE URBAN STRUCTURES

The attempt to grasp urban realities in Palermo under Byzantine domination is a difficult task.<sup>83</sup> In a sense, one can argue that its outer wall is at one and the same time a symbol of Palermo's might and a symptom of its relative underdevelopment. It was indeed the walls which dictated the choice of the Kings of Ravenna to place at Palermo one of only two Germanic garrisons on the island, the other being at Syracuse. Once again, it is no surprise to find that it was these same two towns that Belisarius, when embarking upon the conquest of the peninsula, provided with troops.<sup>84</sup> The capacity of the city, whose troops had already been defeated in open country, to sustain a very long siege before yielding to the forces of Islam testifies to the good state of repair of the walls even as late as the beginning of the 9th century, the latter having perhaps benefited from a programme of fortification agreed by the imperial authorities in the middle of the 8th century.<sup>85</sup> Unfortunately we lack precise details regarding the defensive worth of this wall. We know that the small boats

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<sup>81</sup> Nicolas Oikonomidès, *Les listes de préséance byzantines des IX<sup>e</sup> et X<sup>e</sup> siècles*, Le monde Byzantin 4 (Paris, 1972), p. 341.

<sup>82</sup> Jean Durliat, "Évêque et administration municipale au VII<sup>e</sup> siècle," in Claude Lepelley, ed., *La fin de la cité antique et le début de la cité médiévale de la fin du III<sup>e</sup> siècle à l'avènement de Charlemagne (Actes du colloque tenu à l'Université de Paris X-Nanterre, 1-3 avril 1993)* (Bari, 1996), pp. 273-86 and, more specifically in relation to Byzantine Italy, Jean Durliat, "L'évêque et sa cité en Italie byzantine d'après la correspondance de Grégoire le Grand," in *L'évêque dans l'histoire de l'Église (Actes de la 7<sup>ème</sup> rencontre d'histoire religieuse tenue à Fontevrault, les 14 et 15 octobre 1983)* (Angers, 1984), pp. 21-32.

<sup>83</sup> Rosa Maria Bonacasa Carra, "Palermo in età imperiale romana. Testimonianze e monumenti del primo cristianesimo a Palermo," *Kokalos* 33 (1987), p. 307, as regards Giuseppe Agnello, *Palermo Bizantina* (Amsterdam, 1969).

<sup>84</sup> Procopius, *History of the Wars*, 5.8.1.

<sup>85</sup> Ibn al-Athīr, *BAS*, it., 1: 363.

hoisted up to the tops of the masts of Belisarius's ships must have swayed about ten metres above the sea.<sup>86</sup> Now, since the difference in height was only perceived once the ships were right up against the city walls, the latter were not much lower. This point aside, it is as well to stress that the walls remained more or less what they had been in the Punic period.<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, the distribution of necropolises suggests that Palermo was not surrounded by suburban quarters,<sup>88</sup> and this fact does not argue for great prosperity.<sup>89</sup> The urban space, flanked by the Kemonia and the Papireto and extending from the acropolis to the sea, would correspond to that of a town that was small in size, perhaps forty or so hectares in surface area.<sup>90</sup> One can better assess its importance by recalling that certain eastern *kômopoleis*, these townships without the rights of a city, were far bigger. Thus, El Bara, in the Syrian limestone massif, covered an area almost eight times that of the Palermo of Late Antiquity.<sup>91</sup> In Sicily itself, certain agro-towns of this type seem to have been as large as Palermo.<sup>92</sup> We can therefore understand why Procopius twice describes the city as a simple *chôrion*.<sup>93</sup> Within the city walls certain elements of the ancient road system seem to have survived through the Early Middle Ages, such, as very probably, the fine, broad, paved street which, in crossing the whole town from east to west, accommodated a market, according to the Muslim authors.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> The mast of a classical dromon apparently measured some 10.65 metres, Pryor, *The Age of the dromon*, p. 244.

<sup>87</sup> Wilson, "Towns of Sicily," p. 153; Oscar Belvedere, "Appunti sulla topografia antica di Panormo," *Kokalos* 33 (1987), pp. 290–91.

<sup>88</sup> The only exception might concern the remains of an establishment that has come to light in this zone, but Wilson, "Towns of Sicily," p. 155, reckons that it could just as easily be a suburban villa.

<sup>89</sup> One will recall that the handsome residences of the Villa Bonnano seem to collapse after the 4th century, even though they had been located in the heart of the town (Wilson, "Towns of Sicily," p. 156). Conversely, Bonacasa Carra, "Primo cristianesimo," p. 323, argues for the dynamism of Palermo in the Late Empire, invoking the evidence of the necropolises, but the confinement of the town within the city walls would seem to have been a deciding factor.

<sup>90</sup> Wilson, "Towns of Sicily," p. 143 n. 177.

<sup>91</sup> Cécile Morrisson and Jean-Pierre Sodini, "The Sixth-Century Economy," in Angeliki Laiou, ed., *Economic History of Byzantium from the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century*, *Dumbarton Oaks Studies* 39 (Washington DC, 2002), 1, p. 180; for the surface area of the Sicilian cities see Wilson, "Towns of Sicily," p. 143 n. 177.

<sup>92</sup> Oscar Belvedere, "Organizzazione fondiaria e insediamenti nella Sicilia di età imperiale," *Corso di cultura sull'Arte Ravennate e Bizantina* 43 (1997), pp. 33–60, pp. 44–45.

<sup>93</sup> Procopius, *History of the Wars*, 5.5.12 and 13.

<sup>94</sup> Wilson, "Towns of Sicily," p. 155; Belvedere, "Topografia antica," p. 293.

Aside from the above, what we know of the urban structures of Palermo concerns the city's religious establishments.<sup>95</sup> Again, this information only refers to the turn of the 6th and 7th centuries, when Gregory the Great's correspondence offers us a certain number of insights into Palermitan life. The pope's interest in the city certainly stemmed in large part from the fact of his having himself founded three monasteries there.<sup>96</sup> They have been identified with the monasteries of Saint Hermes,<sup>97</sup> of the *Praetoritanum*,<sup>98</sup> and of Saint Hadrian.<sup>99</sup> To these foundations at least five suburban monasteries—Saint Theodore,<sup>100</sup> Saint-Maxim-and-Saint-Agatha, detached in 598 from Saint Hermes,<sup>101</sup> and the nunnery of Saint-Martin<sup>102</sup>—were added. Conversely, the oratory of Saint Agnes would seem not to have had any income of its own, and no doubt depended upon another foundation.<sup>103</sup>

The monasteries were in any case not the only pious foundations to which the charity of landed aristocrats in Palermo could give rise. Thus, in October 598, the *defensor* Fantin was charged by the pope with overseeing, out of the inheritance of the *vir illustris* Isidore, the foundation of a *xenon*, that is, a sort of hostelry serving to welcome travellers.<sup>104</sup> A second

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<sup>95</sup> Bonacasa Carra, "Primo cristianesimo," p. 309, traces the first mention of a Church of Palermo to as far back as the pontificate of Leo I. The necropolises indicate that the new religion was not in fact widely diffused prior to the 4th century.

<sup>96</sup> From a total of six Sicilian foundations, on this point see Richards, *Consul of God*, p. 32.

<sup>97</sup> *Italia Pontificia X. Calabria-Insulae*, ed. Paul Fridolin Kehr (Berlin, 1975), pp. 236–38. The pope describes this establishment as *monasterii mei: Registrum*, V, 4. There is no cast-iron evidence linking it to the present-day site of San Giovanni degli Eremiti, Lynn T. White, *Latin Monasticism in Norman Sicily* (Cambridge, 1938), pp. 123–30. This monastery did in fact have a double structure, and its suburban house, dedicated to Saint Maxim and Saint Agatha, obtained its independence in October 598, see below.

<sup>98</sup> *Italia Pontificia X*, pp. 239–41. The monastery would seem still to have been under construction during summer 592 when Gregory the Great reproached the rector Peter for this delay in the works, *Registrum*, II, 50.

<sup>99</sup> *Italia Pontificia X*, p. 241.

<sup>100</sup> *Italia Pontificia X*, pp. 235–36.

<sup>101</sup> This latter is situated six miles from the town, *Italia Pontificia X*, pp. 238–239. We find for this establishment the formula *monasterii mei: Registrum*, IX, 20. Furthermore, it is possible that this suburban monastery had been given to another Church on the south coast, the see of Triocala. Bishop Peter in fact laid claim to forty *solidi* still deposited at Saint Hermes, from which Saint-Maxim-and-Saint-Agatha had recently been detached. Peter also transferred certain monks elsewhere (*Registrum*, IX, 21).

<sup>102</sup> *Italia Pontificia X*, pp. 241–242. We can in no way be certain that the monastery built in 1347 is to be identified as the direct successor of the foundation mentioned by Gregory the Great.

<sup>103</sup> *Registrum*, II, 50.

<sup>104</sup> *Registrum*, IX, 35.

institution of this type, dedicated to Saint Theodore,<sup>105</sup> received the properties of its former administrator, Bacauda, but nothing is known about the donor.<sup>106</sup> The bishopric itself had at its disposal at least one *xenon*, of sufficient importance that the deacon who assumed responsibility for it could subsequently have had his eye on the episcopate. Furthermore, the *Life of Saint Gregory of Agrigento* mentions a Palermitan property of the bishop of Agrigento: the *episkopeion* of Saint George which was called the *Libertinon*.<sup>107</sup> This “pied-à-terre” probably also served as a *xenon* welcoming the dependants of the Agrigentan Church who came to Palermo, and perhaps others also. The building’s second name refers a priori to the legendary figure of a bishop of Agrigento who was Saint Peter’s contemporary, and who was mentioned in the *Passio of Pellegrinus of Agrigento*.<sup>108</sup> No doubt the simplest hypothesis is that this property had something to do with an incumbent of the see of Agrigento, who named it after the founder of his Church, and who later bequeathed it to his see. However, one cannot rule out the possibility of this *xenon* being identified with the church of Saint George *ad Sedem*, whose poverty Gregory the Great sought to remedy by reattaching it to the monastery of *Praetoritanum*.<sup>109</sup> If this was indeed the case, the *xenon* would subsequently have entered into the patrimony of the Church of Agrigento, through, for example, a procedure of commutation.

Finally, we should mention the foundations of this type which belonged to the Jewish community, and which seem to have been fairly numerous. They were answerable to the synagogues (of which there therefore existed more than one in the city), sometimes even adjoining them, and they were endowed with gardens.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Some doubt remains as to the identification of the *xenon* which Bacauda set up as legatee of his goods, but this question arises in a letter dedicated to the problems of the monastery of Saint Martin, located within the territory of Palermo (*Registrum*, I, 9). It is therefore very likely that Bacauda worked on behalf of the hospice of this name, founded by a certain Peter. One should distinguish this foundation from the homonym which, cited in a letter of June–July (*Registrum*, IX, 171) addressed to the person responsible for the eastern section of the patrimonium of Rome, cannot be located in Palermo.

<sup>106</sup> *Registrum*, I, 9, dated October 590.

<sup>107</sup> *Leontios presbyteros von Rom, Das Leben des heiligen Gregorios von Agrigent*, ed. Alfred Berger (Berlin, 1994), 47, p. 202, ll. 12–14.

<sup>108</sup> *Passion de saint Pellegrinus d'Agrigente*, p. 246, ll. 57–61.

<sup>109</sup> *Registrum*, IX, 7.

<sup>110</sup> *Registrum*, IX, 38, in October 598, a complaint was submitted to Gregory the Great on the part of the Jewish community of Palermo, denouncing the wrongful seizures perpetrated by bishop Victor of Palermo, who had consecrated for christian worship the *synagogas in civitate Panormitana positas cum hospitiiis suis*.

If the number of pious foundations located on Palermitan territory, within and without the city walls, is impressive, we know on the other hand relatively little about the high-flying aristocrats based in the city and liable to have endowed them. Gregory the Great's correspondence in fact mentions at most five persons of any prominence.<sup>111</sup> Let us begin by listing individuals who were noteworthy for their wealth but who did not belong to the senatorial class. Thus, Praeiecta confirmed the act through which she gave two *massae* and a house located in Palermo to the Church of Rome, while reserving a part of what was produced there for herself.<sup>112</sup> Adeodatus, for his part, would seem to have been a notable of the city since, upon embracing the monastic life, he got rid of his property, which included slaves, houses and gardens within the city and a more or less important share of three *fundi*.<sup>113</sup> Only three living individuals were therefore senators: the *vir clarissimus* Boniface, excommunicated by his own bishop,<sup>114</sup> the *vir illustris* John<sup>115</sup> and, above all, the patrician Venantius, whom the pope addressed using the formula *excellentia vestra*.<sup>116</sup> He even aspired in 591–92 to the honorary consulship, requesting the pope's backing to this effect, and was ready to disburse 130 pounds of gold in order to fulfil this ambition.<sup>117</sup> He should probably be identified with a descendant of Fl. Rufius Venantius Opilio, patrician and Praetorian Prefect, a man who was active at the beginning of the 6th century and who took on the consulate in 524.<sup>118</sup> He clearly appears to have been the only genuinely high-flying aristocrat and, consequently, the pontiff's main interlocutor, notably under the episcopate of the unworthy bishop Victor and during the succession to the latter.<sup>119</sup>

<sup>111</sup> Discounting the absentee landowners and the individuals mentioned posthumously.

<sup>112</sup> *Registrum*, IX, 39, dated October 598; *PCBE*, II, Praeiecta, pp. 1813–14.

<sup>113</sup> *Registrum*, XIII, 3, dated September 602; *PCBE*, II, Adeodatus 21, pp. 26–27. His having entered a monastery does not definitively rule out membership of the senate, since the pope only refers to him as *servus Dei*.

<sup>114</sup> *Registrum*, III, 27. *PCBE*, II, Bonifatius 32, pp. 339–40.

<sup>115</sup> *Registrum*, IX, 14.

<sup>116</sup> *PCBE*, II, Venantius 7, pp. 2257–58. This figure should be distinguished from the patrician homonym from Syracuse.

<sup>117</sup> *PCBE*, II, Venantius 7, p. 2257; *PLRE*, III, Venantius 3 and 4, pp. 1368–69. The affair is addressed in *Registrum*, II, 36. Venantius offers 30 pounds of gold to the treasury, when the asking price is 100 pounds. I therefore follow Laniado, *Notables municipaux*, p. 163 n. 312, who regards the 30 pounds of gold mentioned in the letter as an overbid. Conversely, I take my distance from him when he then identifies Venantius with a simple *vir clarissimus*.

<sup>118</sup> *PCBE*, II, Opilio 4, pp. 1557–58.

<sup>119</sup> *PCBE*, II, Victor 16, pp. 2282–84.



The aristocracy of Palermo, with just one exception, therefore does not appear to have been particularly outstanding at the end of the 6th century, by contrast with the rest of the island. In fact, the majority of senators lived in towns on the east coast. If one correlates this fact with the abundance of religious foundations, one might well wonder whether the two phenomena are not linked, with the proliferation of pious houses reflecting the decline of the traditional elites or the importance of absentee landowners concerned to protect their properties by consecrating them to God. Gregory the Great's foundations do moreover fit neatly within this same framework, and mention might also be made of the two great Roman hospitals of the *Valerii* and of the *Anicii* which were endowed on the territory of Palermo. Finally, the growth of Roman properties in the region of Palermo seems to have been particularly rapid since the Palermitan patrimony became autonomous at the end of the 6th century, a development which would best be accounted for in terms of a proliferation of donations linked to the decline of the aristocracy residing in the city. Conversely, all of this might also be explained by the reinforcement of the power of the bishop of Palermo in the course of the 6th to 7th centuries, with the disappearance of the senatorial class placing ever more pious houses in a relation of direct dependence upon them.

#### THE ECONOMY OF BYZANTINE PALERMO

Palermo's economy was based upon the complementarity between its rich agricultural hinterland and the excellent port evoked by the very name of the city. We should once again recall that this trump card would seem to have legitimised the interest taken in the city by the Severian Dynasty, who were concerned to guarantee the security and vitality of relations between Africa and Rome.<sup>120</sup> The decision probably taken by the imperial authorities to make Palermo one of the principal bases of the Sicilian navy was for this selfsame reason.

The importance of the port of Palermo would certainly account for the large number of hostelries in the city, and more particularly I would stress that two of the great pious institutions of early medieval Rome appear to have been possessionated, or to have had at any rate some interests, in Palermitan territory. In relation to the activities of Rome's Palermitan

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<sup>120</sup> Giardina, "Quadro storico," p. 239.

patrimony, Gregory the Great evokes both the *xenodochion* of the *Valerii*<sup>121</sup> and that of the *Anicii*.<sup>122</sup> The sites occupied by these institutions in the Eternal City<sup>123</sup> contain the richest Oriental ceramic materials to have come to light, which raises the question of a possible role of Sicilian estates in supplying Rome with products of this type.<sup>124</sup> Finally, we should recall the concern of the bishops of Agrigento to maintain a “*pied-à-terre*” in this important relay-station.

Furthermore, the port’s activity was reflected in the presence of various communities of oriental merchants in Palermo in the 6th and 7th centuries. We have seen that the city’s synagogues were endowed with hostelries, and the complaint of the Jews of Palermo was transmitted to the pope by their Roman co-religionists, with whom, therefore, they were in contact. These houses doubtless received foreign Jews whose passage through Palermo would best be explained in terms of commercial interests.<sup>125</sup> Gregory the Great also evokes the figure of the Jewish merchant Nostamnus.<sup>126</sup> The latter was in conflict with an agent of the Church of Rome who refused to hand over to him an acknowledgement of debts, when he had already reimbursed his creditors by selling his possessions, foremost among them his ship.<sup>127</sup> We learn on this occasion that the functionaries of the Church of Rome based in Palermo were involved commercially with Jewish merchant ship-owners. The *defensor* brought into line by the pope appears within a “cartel” of creditors who had backed Nostamnus financially, an

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<sup>121</sup> *Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae*, ed. Eva Margareta Steinby (Rome, 2000), V, p. 217. *Registrum*, IX, 67; IX, 83. The foundation’s Palermitan properties could be accounted for by the incorporation into the patrimony of the *Valerii* of the properties of the *Maesii*, an important family from western Sicily. Indeed, a sarcophagus attests the unions which existed between the two *gentes*: Bivona, “Panormo romana,” p. 267 and Livia Bivona, “Note sulla gens *Maesia* nella Sicilia occidentale,” in *Philias Charin, Miscellanea di studi classici in onore di E. Manni* (Rome, 1980), II, pp. 233–42.

<sup>122</sup> We should recall that Gregory the Great was frequently put into contact with this family.

<sup>123</sup> The Celio for the first, the zone of the celebrated Crypta Balbi for the second.

<sup>124</sup> For the Celio, Francesco Pacetti, “Celio. Basilica Hilariana: scavi 1987–1989,” in Lidia Paroli and Laura Vendittelli, eds., *Roma dall’antichità al medioevo II, contesti tardoantichi e altomedievali* (Rome, 2004), pp. 439–40 and table 4; in the same volume Germana Vatta and Tommaso Bertoldi, “Celio. Basilica Hilariana: scavi 1997,” p. 458; for the Crypta Balbi, see Lucia Sagui, “Il deposito della Crypta Balbi: un testimonianza imprevedibile sulla Roma del VII secolo?,” in Lucia Sagui, ed., *La ceramica in Italia*, pp. 305–330.

<sup>125</sup> On the Jewish institutions of this type, see Bernadette J. Broton, “Women leaders in the ancient synagogue,” *Brown Judaic Studies* 36 (1982), p. 143.

<sup>126</sup> We cannot be certain that the affair evoked unfolded in Palermo, but the fact that it was the only major port in this zone of Sicily lends weight to this hypothesis.

<sup>127</sup> *Registrum*, IX, 40.

important piece of information since ecclesiastics do not legally have the right to lend at interest, a position reaffirmed by the Council fathers at the Quinsext Council (691–92).<sup>128</sup> He in fact intervenes as administrator of the ecclesiastical fortune and not in a personal capacity.<sup>129</sup>

The possible influence of the Oriental communities over Sicilian financial practices calls to mind a second merchant, the Syrian Cosmas. He had contracted *in negotio* a series of debts which threatened not only his goods but even his liberty and that of his children, and this despite the existing legislation.<sup>130</sup> The sums involved were as much as one hundred and fifty *solidi*, or a little more than two pounds of gold. Nonetheless, the pope decided to settle the affair with sixty *solidi* deducted from Church revenues, even recommending that some of this sum be set aside and the balance paid to Cosmas, who was henceforth propertyless and obliged to work in order to ensure his own subsistence. Although his commercial activities seem to have been on a significant scale (the pope contacted on his behalf those responsible for the two sections, eastern and western, of his Sicilian patrimonies),<sup>131</sup> Cosmas, like the Jew Nostamnus, did not have an important patrimony at his disposal, and unsuccessful business affairs had brought him economically to his knees. Finally, the pontiff's intervention on behalf of Cosmas calls to mind another Sicilian *negotiator*, Liberatus. This latter, who resided on lands belonging to Rome, had been incorporated at his own request into the ecclesiastical familia.<sup>132</sup> It is therefore probable that Cosmas availed himself of similar ties in order to obtain pontifical intervention. One surmises that these agents played some role in the commercialisation of the agricultural surplus from the patrimonies, following a model all too familiar in the early Middle

<sup>128</sup> Angeliki Laiou, "God and Mammon: Credit, Trade, Profit and the Canonist," in *Tò Byzántio katà tòn 120 aióna. Kanonikò díkaiο, krátos kai κοινωνία*, ed. Nicolas Oikonomidès, Ἑταιρεία Βυζαντινῶν καὶ Μεταβυζαντινῶν Μελετῶν. Διπτύχων Παράφυλλα 3 (Athens, 1991), pp. 261–300, in particular pp. 297–300; also Angeliki Laiou, "The Church, Economic Thought and Economic Practice," in *The Christian East. Its Institutions and its Thought. A Critical Reflection, Papers of the International Scholarly Congress for the 75th Anniversary of the Pontifical Oriental Institute (Rome, 30 Mai–5 Juin 1993)*, ed. Robert F. Taft, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 251 (Rome, 1996), pp. 439–53.

<sup>129</sup> Léontios de Néapolis, *Vie de Syméon le Fou et Vie de Jean de Chypre*, eds. André Jean Festugière and Lennart Rudén, Bibliothèque archéologique et historique de l'Institut français d'archéologie de Beyrouth 95, (Paris, 1974), pp. 452–53 (henceforth *Vie de saint Jean l'aumônier*).

<sup>130</sup> *Corpus iuris civilis*. III. *Novellae*, ed. Rudolf Schoell, 13th ed. (Hildesheim, 1993), *Novelle*, 134, 7.

<sup>131</sup> *Registrum*, III, 55, July 593 and IV, 43, August 594.

<sup>132</sup> *Registrum*, I, 42.

Ages,<sup>133</sup> their activities enabling the clergy to avoid any direct involvement themselves.<sup>134</sup>

The most famous of the easterners in Palermo, however, was the *linarius alexandrinus* Peter.<sup>135</sup> Known by the handsome funeral inscription commemorating his death in 602, his activity in the textiles sector can be linked to several other documents establishing the undeniable continuity of this activity. Thus, a funeral inscription from the region of Sofiana dating from the 4th century mentions Ἰούδας σαβανᾶς, a term that refers to the making of *σάβανον*, that is, of good quality linen garments.<sup>136</sup> Indeed, those serving in the Imperial Bedchamber (*cubiculum*) could call upon a functionary responsible for overseeing such garments, who was known as the *a sabanis*.<sup>137</sup> Now, a seal from the Manganaro collection does indeed attest to the activity of this same functionary in Sicily during the 8th century. His titles, *hypatos* and *spatharocandidatus*, prove him to have been a prominent figure within the provincial administration.<sup>138</sup> This little sigillographic monument is an important relay-station between the inscription from Sofiana and the documents from the Cairo Geniza, which attests the significance of the Sicilian imports of Egyptian linen supplying the island's textile industry.<sup>139</sup>

But what precisely was Peter's relationship with Sicily? Was he an Egyptian merchant in transit, who had died when travelling on business, or an easterner who had settled in Sicily? Both hypotheses are a priori plausible: the island's links with Egypt are well attested at this period,<sup>140</sup>

<sup>133</sup> Michael McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy. Communications and Commerce, A. D. 300–900* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 11.

<sup>134</sup> In the 7th century the eastern clergy indulged in trade, if credence is given to the case of the nauclere priest of Yassi Ada (Frederick van Doorninck, jr., "Byzantine Shipwrecks," in Angeliki Laiou, ed., *Economic History of Byzantium*, p. 901) and in the 8th century John of Jerusalem stigmatised the involvement of bishops in commercial activities (Angeliki Laiou, "Exchange and Trade, Seventh-Twelfth Centuries," *ibid.*, p. 706).

<sup>135</sup> *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, X, 7330 = Livia Bivona, *Iscrizioni latine lapidarie del museo di Palermo*, (Palermo, 1970) (*Sikelika*, 5), p. 54 n. 37.

<sup>136</sup> Jaime Curbera, "Σαβανᾶς and Ἐσταμινᾶς. New nouns in -ᾶς," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 108 (1995), pp. 101–102.

<sup>137</sup> Jean-Claude Cheynet, "Sceaux byzantins du musée de Seldjuk," *Revue numismatique* 41 (1999), p. 7.

<sup>138</sup> Manganaro, "Sigilli diplomatici," 27.

<sup>139</sup> Solomon D. Goitein, "Sicily and southern Italy in the Cairo Geniza documents," *Archivio Storico per la Sicilia Orientale* 67 (1971), p. 11 and 14.

<sup>140</sup> Thus Gregory the Great used the Siculo-Calabrian patrimonies to furnish the patriarch of Alexandria with timber for construction: *Registrum*, XIII, 43, also *Registrum*, VI, 61, VII, 31, IX, 176, X, 14. The *Vie de saint Jean l'Aumônier* mentions imports of Sicilian wheat into Egypt at the beginning of the 7th century (*Vie de saint Jean l'aumônier*, XI, l. 74–77,

but we also know of numerous easterners who had settled once and for all. I am obviously thinking first and foremost of the childhood friend of Procopius encountered when disembarking with Belisarius, and who was plying his trade between Sicily and Africa.<sup>141</sup> However, the palaeochristian epitaphs from Syracuse also furnish instances of four, and very probably five, Syrians, of two Phoenicians, of one person from Constantinople, and of two, and maybe three, individuals from Asia Minor (Lycia, Ephesus, perhaps Cappodocia).<sup>142</sup> In Catania, inscriptions preserve the memory of a citizen of Nicomedia.<sup>143</sup> Finally, we should not forget Pope Sergius, who was born in Sicily of a Syrian father from Antioch.<sup>144</sup>

Faced with these two conflicting hypotheses, the quality of the inscription, and the language used, would seem to be the deciding factors. It is in fact hard to envisage this inscription having been funded by those who were simply local collaborators of the deceased Peter, concerned to honour the memory of a foreign trading partner who had died in their midst. The choice of Latin suggests that this latter was very well integrated into a society which seems to have been distinctly less Hellenized than that of eastern Sicily.<sup>145</sup> With the Conca d'Oro also providing perfect conditions

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p. 359; trans. pp. 459–60). Various archaeological signs point in the same direction: three coins struck in Alexandria are preserved at Messina, one at Acireale, two at Enna and one at Cefalù; Egyptian amphorae LR 7 or Egloff 172 have been found at Kaukana and Capo Mulini: Paola Pelagatti, "Kaukana: dalle escursione di Paolo Orsi agli scavi degli anni '60," in Paola Pelagatti and Giovanni Di Stefano, eds., *Kaukana, il chorion bizantino* (Palermo, 1999), pp. 9–19; Edoardo Tortorici, "Contributi per una carta archeologica subacquea della costa di Catania," in *Archeologia Subacquea. Studi, ricerche e documenti*, 3, (Rome, 2002), pp. 275–334, pp. 292–301; finally, some ampoullae of Saint Menas have come to light in Sicily, Anna Maria Marchese, "Tre ampolle di S. Mena a Siracusa," *Quaderni dell'Istituto di Archeologia della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia della Università di Messina* 7 (1992), 61–64.

<sup>141</sup> Procopius, *History of the Wars*, III, 14, 7–8, pp. 126–128.

<sup>142</sup> Anna Avramea, "Mort loin de la patrie. L'apport des inscriptions paléochrétiennes," in Guglielmo Cavallo and Cyril Mango, eds., *Epigrafia Medievale Greca e Latina. Ideologia e Funzione (Atti del seminario di Erice, 12–18 settembre 1991)* (Spoleto, 1995), pp. 58–59, n° 369–372 and probably n° 376, attest some Syrians; n° 373, a Phoenician, n° 374, a Constantinopolitan, n° 375, an Ephesian, n° 377, a Lycian; I would further add IG, XIV, 117, which mentions a citizen of Makra Kômè, near Sidon, according to the correction proposed by Denis Feissel, "Remarques de toponymie syrienne d'après des inscriptions grecques chrétiennes trouvées hors de Syrie," *Syria* 59 (1982), 319–341, pp. 340–41. The author likewise proposes that the anonymous Tripolitan of *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*, IV, 6 be transferred to Phoenicia, but the catacombs have also delivered up a trace of a merchant from Leptis Magna, while some Sicilian lamps have been found in Libya.

<sup>143</sup> Avramea, "Mort loin de la patrie," p. 60, n° 381.

<sup>144</sup> *Liber Pontificalis*, ed. Louis Duchesne, 2 vols. (Paris, 1886–1892), 86.1.

<sup>145</sup> See the epigraphic evidence: Livia Bivona, *Iscrizioni latine lapidarie del museo di Palermo*, Sikelika, 5 (Palermo, 1970), n° 9–40; Maria Teresa Manni Piraino, *Iscrizioni greche lapidarie del museo di Palermo*, Palermo, 1972 (*Sikelika*, 6), n° 33. On the importance of

for the cultivation of flax,<sup>146</sup> it is hardly likely that Peter was a merchant in transit, and I would prefer to see him as an artisan of high social status, permanently settled in Palermo. To conclude, I would cite two toponyms identifying landed estates in Palermitan territory which do indeed seem to refer to the activities of fullers, namely, the Church's *fundus Fulloniacus*<sup>147</sup> and, at a stretch, the monk Adeodatus's *fundus Folloniaca et Alisa*.<sup>148</sup>

Another product transiting through the port was probably wine, since its marketing unleashed a conflict between the bishop of Palermo and its clergy. Indeed, Gregory the Great had to enjoin a newly elected bishop of Palermo to respect the agreement reached with his clergy, an agreement guaranteeing the latter the option of buying the wine produced on the bishopric's land.<sup>149</sup> We here catch a glimpse of what was the main source of activity at the port of Palermo, namely, the export of what was produced on the great estates in its hinterland. Indeed, we know of at least five such landed estates through the register of the letters of Gregory the Great and the *Liber pontificalis*.<sup>150</sup> Now, these Sicilian estates were on average distinctly larger than elsewhere in Italy, and their average income nearly three times higher.<sup>151</sup> Furthermore, since the early Empire there had existed in the region of Palermo a cluster of imperial properties<sup>152</sup> which constituted perhaps all or part of the *massa Taurana* given by Constantine the Great to the Church of Rome, and which is at the origin of the pontiffs' Palermitan patrimony.<sup>153</sup> The fact of its having become an autonomous administrative entity by separating off at the end of the 6th century from the one administered from Syracuse likewise attests to its growth, as we have already emphasised.<sup>154</sup>

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Peter's epitaph as regards the linguistic situation, Vera von Falkenhausen, "Chiesa greca e chiesa latina in Sicilia prima della conquista arabe," *Archivio Storico Siracusano* n.s. 5 (1978–79), p. 144 and lastly Kalle Korhonen, "Greek and Latin in the urban and rural epigraphy of Byzantine Sicily," *Acta Byzantina Fennica* n.s. 3 (2009–2010), 116–35.

<sup>146</sup> This latter requires a great deal of humidity, and in this regard we should note that the papyrus was itself cultivated in this zone in the 10th century, *BAS* it., 1: 21.

<sup>147</sup> *Registrum*, I, 9, dated October 590.

<sup>148</sup> *Registrum*, XIII, 3, l. 8–9.

<sup>149</sup> *Registrum*, XIII, 45, dated July 603.

<sup>150</sup> *Liber Pontificalis*, 33, 37, *Registrum*, IX, 23; IX, 119; IX, 128.

<sup>151</sup> Domenico Vera, "Massa fundorum. Forme della grande proprietà e poteri della città in Italia fra Costantino e Gregorio Magno," *MEFRA* 111–2 (1999), pp. 999–1000.

<sup>152</sup> Dorothy J. Crawford, "Imperial Estates," in Moses I. Finley, ed., *Studies in Roman Imperial Property* (Cambridge, 1976), p. 69; Bivona, "Panormo romana," pp. 261–64.

<sup>153</sup> *Liber Pontificalis*, 33, 37.

<sup>154</sup> The effects of this reform are first perceptible in *Registrum*, II, 50, l. 39.

The role played by the ecclesiastical, and notably the pontifical, patrimonies in the activities of the port of Palermo allows us to advance new explanations for an apparent paradox which has recently been highlighted. The discovery of a particular type of amphora has in fact brought out dynamic trading relationships between the region of Palermo and the Tyrrhenian coast, notably Campania, until a relatively late date.<sup>155</sup> The reader will recall in this regard the mention in Gregory the Great's letters of a *negotiator* plying between Palermo and Misena,<sup>156</sup> and the case of Cicerio, a slave of this Church who took refuge in the monastery in Sicily.<sup>157</sup> However, Alessia Rovelli has emphasised, and with good cause, that such trading relationships are not borne out by what we know of monetary circulation.<sup>158</sup> Indeed, her careful study of finds in the city of Naples reveals the absence of monetary links between Sicily and Campania in this same period. Now, the same admission would apply in the case of Rome, despite the importance of the Papacy's Sicilian patrimonies.<sup>159</sup> The best explanation we can give for this paradox would be that the main part of the traffic attested by these amphoras corresponded to exchanges of a demesial type, that is, to transfers of rents in kind.

The articulation between a hinterland rich in great estates and a port of the first importance therefore served to guarantee for a long time the city's relative prosperity, in a context in which its potential rivals from the north-west were fading from view. This conclusion prompts us to consider in a new light the *Descriptio totius Mundi*, which is an abridged version of the famous *Expositio totius mundi et gentium*.<sup>160</sup> This text, the work of a certain *Iunior philosophus*, unknown elsewhere, mentions in Sicily: *Inter ceteras vero tres habet splendidas civitates, Syracusam, Palermum*

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<sup>155</sup> Fabiola Ardizzone, "Rapporti commerciali tra la Sicilia occidentale ed il Tirreno centro-meridionale nell'VIII secolo alla luce del rinvenimento di alcuni contenitori da trasporto," in Gian Piero Brogiolo, ed., *Il Congresso Nazionale di Archeologia Medievale (Brescia, settembre-ottobre 2000)* (Florence, 2000), pp. 402–408.

<sup>156</sup> *Registrum*, IX, 145.

<sup>157</sup> *Registrum*, V, 28.

<sup>158</sup> Alessia Rovelli, "Naples, ville et atelier monétaire de l'Empire byzantin. L'apport des fouilles archéologiques récentes (VI<sup>e</sup>–IX<sup>e</sup> siècle)," in *Mélanges Cécile Morrisson*, Travaux et Mémoires du Centre d'histoire et de civilisation de Byzance 16 (Paris, 2011), pp. 708–709.

<sup>159</sup> See Ermanno Arslan and Cécile Morrisson, "Monete e moneta a Roma nell'alto medioevo, Roma fra Oriente e Occidente," *Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo* 49 (Spoleto, 2002), 1255–1302 and Vivien Prigent, "Les empereurs isauriens et la confiscation des patrimoines pontificaux d'Italie du Sud," *MEFRM* 116–2 (2004), 557–94.

<sup>160</sup> On this text, see Umberto Livadiotti and Marco Di Branco, *Anonimo del IV secolo, Descrizione del mondo e delle sue genti* (Rome, 2005).

*et Catinam*.<sup>161</sup> When we compare it to the earlier text, the *Expositio*, we thus find Palermo appearing between Syracuse and Catania. We do not know precisely when this text was composed, but the author's adoption of the Arabic form of the city's name suggests a fairly late date. We could nonetheless have to do with a subsequent deformation of the composition, but if so it is one that had already featured in the archetype of the three manuscripts of the same origin that have transmitted the text to us.<sup>162</sup> This work thus bears witness to the development of Palermo prior to the Islamic conquest, and the image we derive from the *Registrum* can well bear this out. However, although we are not able to provide any concrete illustration of the phenomenon, the odds are strongly in favour of Palermo's prosperity showing the effects at the beginning of the 8th century of the fall of Africa and of the consequent decline of trading relations along the Rome-Carthage axis to which the city's economy was naturally connected.<sup>163</sup> The economic weakness of the Sicilian west in relation to the eastern regions clearly emerges from the study of monetary circulation, finds being very rare indeed in the regions of the west.<sup>164</sup>

The development of Palermo during the three centuries or so in which it came under the domination of the Byzantine Empire was thus fairly marked. Paradoxically, its initial dynamism was due to its weak growth during the last centuries of Roman Antiquity. Palermo was then a city of limited size and consequently one whose security could still rely on its old circuit wall of Punic origin. This trump card was doubtless of crucial importance in the development which led to its becoming the dominant urban pole in a Sicilian north-west characterised by the decadence of many of the former cities, in the context of the fall of the Roman Empire in the west. Being an outlet for a rich territory in which great public, ecclesiastical and aristocratic estates must have existed in large numbers, the port of Palermo assumed a prominent economic role in this period, during which various easterners, Jewish, Syrian and Egyptian, settled in

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<sup>161</sup> Cited by Andrea Giardina, "Palermo in età imperiale romana. Conclusioni: Panormo e le *splendidae civitates* di Sicilia," *Kokalos* 33 (1987), p. 336.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 335–37.

<sup>163</sup> The crisis suffered by this commercial axis clearly transpires from a comparison of the ceramic material from the two desposits explored in the Crypta Balbi.

<sup>164</sup> For an account of monetary circulation in this area, see Daniele Castrizio, "La circolazione monetale nella Sicilia romea," in Annliese Nef and Vivien Prigent, eds., *La Sicile de Byzance à l'Islam* (Paris, 2010), pp. 77–94 and Vivien Prigent, "La circulation monétaire en Sicile (VI<sup>e</sup>–VII<sup>e</sup> siècle)," in Enrico Zanini, ed., *The Insular System in the Byzantine Mediterranean*, Nicosia 2007, forthcoming in the British Archaeological Reports.



the city. Its economic responsibilities even survived the rapid disappearance of the traditional elites and the civic magistracies, which yielded to an authority reconstituted around the person of a bishop whose duties were far-reaching indeed, both functionally and geographically. The city's importance was then discernible also in the authorities' decision to make it the anchorage point of Constantinople's power in the west of the island. The involvement of the city's troops in the unrest which culminated in the Aghlabid invasion simply reflects this undermining of the privileged status of the Palermo of the 6th to 7th centuries, in the context of the new economic difficulties experienced by the island, in the course of the 8th century. Paradoxically, the conquest, by bringing new political elites to Palermo, and by restoring close economic ties with Africa, guaranteed the old city a new era of prosperity.

ISLAMIC PALERMO AND THE *DĀR AL-ISLĀM*:  
POLITICS, SOCIETY AND THE ECONOMY  
(FROM THE MID-9TH TO THE MID-11TH CENTURY)

Annliese Nef

Palermo was conquered in 831<sup>1</sup> by Ifrīqiyan troops summoned to the island by the rebel Euphemios, a Sicilian tourmach who, when threatened with punishment, usurped the imperial function<sup>2</sup> and, in 827, solicited the backing of the Aghlabids. It may have taken only four years to seize control of the city, but the difficulty is deciding exactly when it became the capital of Sicily and the seat of an emirate. Indeed, the available sources<sup>3</sup> are late and predicated on the assumption that, no sooner had Palermo been conquered by the Arabo-Muslim troops than it was considered to be the island's capital and Sicily itself an emirate. We are faced here with an *a posteriori* proof of the city and the island's successful integration into the Islamic world, and of the fact that Palermo was one of the important capitals of the *dār al-islām* from the 10th century onwards. While the

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Ibn al-Athīr, *Kitāb al-kāmil*, BAS ar., 1: 272 et BAS it., 1: 368–369.

<sup>2</sup> Vivien Prigent, “La carrière du tourmarque Euphémios, basileus des Romains,” in André Jacob, Jean-Marie Martin and Ghislaine Noyé, eds., *Histoire et culture dans l'Italie byzantine*, Collection de l'École française de Rome, 363 (Rome, 2006), pp. 279–317 and Id., “Pour en finir avec Euphémios, basileus des Romains,” *MEFRM* 118/2 (2006), 375–380.

<sup>3</sup> The most important chronicle so far as Islamic Sicily is concerned is the *Kāmil* of Ibn al-Athīr (1160–1233), used by all subsequent authors, without exception: Ibn al-Athīr, *Kitāb al-kāmil*, ed. Carl J. Tornberg, (Leiden, 1851–1876). Among the three later historians of particular relevance to our topic there are two Maghrebians, namely, Ibn 'Idhārī (second half of the 13th—beginning of the 14th century), whose *Bayān* recounts, among other things, the history of Ifrīqiya between 640 and 1205; and the famous Ibn Khaldūn (1332–1406), author of the *Kitāb al-'Ibar*, which contains a history of the Mashreq and one of the Maghreb. For the former, see Georges Séraphin Colin and Évariste Lévi-Provençal, eds., *Histoire de l'Afrique du Nord et de l'Espagne musulmane intitulée Kitāb al-Bayān* (Leiden, 1948–51), and for the latter Ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-'Ibar* (Cairo, 1867–68). The Egyptian al-Nuwayrī (1278 or 1283–1332), was the author of the *Nihāyat al-'Arab* (Cairo, 1955–85), an encyclopaedic work and a source of real value. Finally, I should mention the sole source which not only is exclusively concerned with Sicily but is also the earliest one to survive, the *Cambridge Chronicle*, an anonymous text dating from the 11th century and preserved in two independent versions, one Greek and the other Arabic, both of which begin in 827, though the second breaks off in 964–65. For the Arabic version, see BAS, ar., 1: 190–203 and for the Greek, *Die byzantinischen Kleinchroniken*, ed. Peter Schreiner, 1, *Einleitung und Texte*, Corpus fontium historiae Byzantinae, 12, Series Vindobonensis (Vienna, 1975), pp. 326–40.

geographical sources from the end of that century (Ibn Ḥawqal, who visited Palermo around 973, and al-Muqaddasī, who completed his geographical survey in 988) provide abundant proof of these facts, we lack historical sources which might enable us to retrace the necessarily gradual transformation of the city and the island.<sup>4</sup>

The fact that Palermo, which had been neither the Byzantine capital of the island nor a particularly important city, should little by little have become the seat of government—and, in the context of a conquest that had not been either easy or swift, this development can only have been gradual—seems to be due to reasons that were first and foremost military.<sup>5</sup> The resistance of Sicily's Byzantine capital, Syracuse, up until 878, but also the difficulty of holding a fair number of localities in central Sicily, Enna among them,<sup>6</sup> and the island's general instability in military terms up until the end of the 9th century,<sup>7</sup> forced the Aghlabids to favour a base of operations which, whilst not being too far to the west, could not be located in a region regarded as somewhat unsure either. The choice of Palermo was therefore due to its geographical situation. If the city's conquerors set such store by Palermo, its high value certainly had something to do with the ease of access from Ifrīqiya, along with the city's qualities as a port. These factors explain why it was that over time the status of Palermo evolved.

Conquered in 831, the city would only fall into the hands of the Hauteville in 1072. Between the middle of the 9th century, to persist with a very

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<sup>4</sup> Sicily must be the only region in which the process was so swift, even though the conquest was itself unusually protracted (827–976). The sources never bring out this point, and imply that it happened of its own accord. Adalgisa De Simone, for her part, assumes that the transformation of Palermo occurred during the two years following the capture of the city, see Adalgisa De Simone, "Il periodo arabo. Palermo araba," in Rosario La Duca, ed., *Storia di Palermo. II. Dal tardo antico all'Islam* (Palermo, 2000), pp. 78–113, p. 80.

<sup>5</sup> Ibn al-Athīr's assertion that, prior to the Arabo-Muslim siege, Palermo had 70,000 inhabitants (but after it only 3000!) is open to doubt; Ibn al-Athīr, *Kitāb al-kāmil*, *BAS* ar., 1: 272 and *BAS* it., 1: 368–69.

<sup>6</sup> The other important city in Byzantine Sicily, to which a part of the defensive (and perhaps also governmental) resources had been transferred in the face of the Aghlabid advance (Ibn al-Athīr describes it as "seat of the king of Sicily" (*dār al-malik bi-Ṣiqillīyya*), Ibn al-Athīr, *Kitāb al-kāmil*, *BAS* ar., 1: 279 and *BAS* it., 1: 379); Enna was thus the principal target of numerous attacks in the course of the early 830s. The city's fall in 859 therefore caused a great stir, see Ibn al-Athīr, *Kitāb al-kāmil*, *BAS* ar., 1: 279–281 and *BAS* it., 1: 379–380.

<sup>7</sup> A point I cannot elaborate upon here, for want of space.

approximate dating,<sup>8</sup> and the middle of the 11th century,<sup>9</sup> Palermo—in Arabic Balarm, Bulurm, Bānarm, and other variants of Panormos, but also al-Madīna (“the town”) or *Ṣiqilliyya* (“Sicily”)<sup>10</sup>—was also the seat of the island’s government. Our focus here will be on this period, and we will seek to show how the city was gradually integrated into the *dār al-islām*, an integration which proceeded at different rates in different spheres.

#### THE POLITICAL INTEGRATION OF PALERMO INTO THE *DĀR AL-ISLĀM*

Neither a foundational city nor an ancient capital, the choice of Palermo recalls, all else being equal, that of Damascus or of Cordoba, in other words, that of cities built on a modest scale and then transformed by their historical destiny.<sup>11</sup> Palermo was at first a reflection of Ifrīqiyan and Aghlabid authority, then later the political centre of Sicily following the Islamic model of the emirate, and finally one of the most important cities in the Fatimid Empire.

#### *An Ifrīqiyan and Aghlabid Reality*

Palermo was not the primary objective of the Aghlabid dynasty, which had in view a Sicily designated in a vague and general fashion in the sources. On the other hand, the city rapidly became a base for military operations conducted on the island and in southern Italy, until such time as complete control over Sicily had been won, in 965, when Rometta fell, and even until 976, when Messina was completely conquered. The choice of Palermo enabled the Aghlabids to keep a distance from the eastern half of the island, where Byzantium still maintained its claims and its strongholds, without however being too far removed either from the front line, so that they could conduct military operations effectively, or from

<sup>8</sup> As things now stand, the earliest known coin minted at Palermo dates from 845 (see *infra*). This year may therefore be regarded as the terminus *post quem* of its change in status.

<sup>9</sup> Here too the precise date of the emirate is not known but must be around 1040, see *infra*.

<sup>10</sup> Adalgisa De Simone, “Palermo nei geografi e viaggiatori arabi del medioevo,” *Studi magrebini* 2 (1968), 129–189, pp. 136–138.

<sup>11</sup> Thierry Bianquis, “Damas,” in Jean-Claude Garcin, ed., *Grandes villes méditerranéennes du monde musulman médiéval*, Collection de l’École française de Rome, 269 (Rome, 2000), pp. 37–55.

Ifriqiyān support if it were needed. Finally, the city's fortifications were a by no means negligible asset.

The circumstances surrounding the decision-making process which ultimately led to the conquest of the island—a process entirely independent of the imperial Abbassid power, and pertaining rather to a regional context characterized by ancient and close links between north-east Africa and Sicily, but also, since the beginnings of the Islamic conquest in the region,<sup>12</sup> by recurrent raids—account for the eminently Ifriqiyān and Aghlabid dimensions of Islamic Palermo's first century.<sup>13</sup> The reinforcing of the city's role over time was an effect of the shift in the centre of gravity of Sicily, which, having been a Byzantine province, became a province within the Islamic Empire, with Kairouan supplanting Constantinople as the island's political reference point, though not without resistance on the part of the latter.<sup>14</sup>

The Ifriqiyān and Aghlabid attributes of Palermo were still further accentuated by the military operations in Sicily, which provided a safety-valve for recurrent tensions between government and army in Ifriqiya, and by the Ifriqiyān dynasty's use of the *jihād* waged against the *Rūm*-s of Sicily and of Southern Italy to consolidate its own legitimacy.<sup>15</sup> Finally, the emirs sent to Palermo were very closely linked to the Aghlabid dynasty and more often than not themselves led their armies into battle.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Mohamed Talbi, *L'émirat aghlabide: Histoire politique* (Paris, 1966) has produced a synoptic account of the Arabo-Muslim expeditions unleashed upon Sicily between 652 and 827 (pp. 384–409). The sources only refer vaguely to Sicily, and do not say specifically where the *razzias* were directed.

<sup>13</sup> Annliese Nef, "Comment les Aghlabides ont décidé de conquérir la Sicile . . .", *Annales islamologiques* 45 (2011), 191–211.

<sup>14</sup> Vivien Prigent, "La politique sicilienne de Romain I<sup>er</sup> Lécapène," in Dominique Barthélemy and Jean-Claude Cheynet, eds., *Guerre et société au Moyen Âge, Byzance-Occident (VIII<sup>e</sup>–XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, Centre de recherche d'histoire et civilisation de Byzance, Monographies 31 (Paris, 2010), pp. 63–84.

<sup>15</sup> This applies to all Aghlabid operations in Sicily, which lasted through the greater part of the dynasty's history (800–909), since they began in 827 and were still under way when this latter had gone. The Aghlabids were particularly likely to have recourse to this ploy when their authority was under threat. See Annliese Nef, "Les instruments de la légitimation politique et la place de légitimité religieuse dans l'Ifriqiya de la fin du IX<sup>e</sup> siècle: l'exemple d'Ibrāhīm II (875–902)," in Annliese Nef and Élise Voguet, eds., *Islam et légitimation du pouvoir dans l'Occident musulman*, Collection de la Casa de Velázquez (Madrid, 2011), pp. 75–91.

<sup>16</sup> Annliese Nef, "Les armées arabo-musulmanes en Sicile et en Italie du Sud (IX<sup>e</sup>–X<sup>e</sup> siècles): composition des troupes et silences des sources," in Dominique Barthélemy and Jean-Claude Cheynet, eds., *Guerre et Société au Moyen Âge, op. cit.*, pp. 85–100.

*Palermo, Seat of Government and Centre of Political Life*

Although Palermo in this first period was one of the few cities in Sicily whose history is documented, and although it was, by virtue of its being henceforth the capital, the space in which any political tensions arising would be perceptible, episodes of this nature were in fact few and far between;<sup>17</sup> it was in the 10th century that they were most frequently encountered. Only once, in 900, did the Palermitans assail the Agrigentans, who had to ask the Ifrīqiyān authorities to intervene. The causes of the conflict between the two cities are none too clear, though they would seem to have stemmed from earlier troubles, the precise nature of which eludes us. Order was, however, restored with the utmost brutality,<sup>18</sup> and subsequent events, notably the decision of a section of the Palermitan elite to take refuge in the Byzantine Empire, bore witness to the Sicilian capital's opposition to the Ifrīqiyān government.

Once it had become the seat of government, Palermo was transformed.<sup>19</sup> Thus, a letter by the monk Theodosius, brought to Palermo along with the other captives seized by the Arabo-Muslim army after the first fall of Syracuse, in 878, furnishes some details regarding the city.<sup>20</sup> He describes Palermo as a densely populated city, which attracted inhabitants from the surrounding areas, but also individuals from the whole of the *dār al-islām*, and even beyond.<sup>21</sup> Theodosius was also struck by the way in which Palermo provided a framework for court life. He thus describes a ceremony which involved the veiling and unveiling of the emir, seated on a throne and hidden behind a curtain.<sup>22</sup> The chronicles also mention the presence in governing circles of eunuchs and slaves whose political role was certainly of great significance,<sup>23</sup> as was commonly the case in the Islamic courts of the period, the Aghlabid court among them. The arrival of the Syracusans in Palermo, in 878, also highlights the city's role as a

<sup>17</sup> Annliese Nef, "La *fitna* sicilienne: une *fitna* inachevée?", *Médiévales* 60 (spring 2011), 103–115.

<sup>18</sup> The *Cambridge Chronicle* describes a massacre, see *BAS* ar. 1: 194 and *BAS* it., 1: 280.

<sup>19</sup> Regarding the dearth of information on this point, see Alessandra Bagnera's article in the present volume.

<sup>20</sup> See Cristina Rognoni, "Au pied de la lettre? Réflexions à propos du témoignage de Théodose moine et grammaticos, sur la prise de Syracuse en 878," in Annliese Nef and Vivien Prigent, eds., *La Sicile de Byzance à l'Islam* (Paris, 2010), pp. 205–228.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 222.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221.

<sup>23</sup> They were blamed for the assassination of the Emir Muḥammad b. Ḥafāja, in 870–71; see Ibn al-Athīr, *Kitāb al-kāmil*, *BAS* ar., 1: 282 et 284 and *BAS* it., 1: 387 and p. 389.

theatre for public processions with a political connotation, which probably followed the central avenue (the *simāt*) running right across the city.<sup>24</sup> Although our knowledge of the history of Palermo under the Aghlabids is fragmentary, half a century after the conquest it would seem to have become both a capital and a city of real importance.

*Echoes of Upheavals in Ifrīqiya: The Coming to Power of the Fatimids*

Sicily, and Palermo in particular, was an echo chamber for major events in Ifrīqiya. The fall of the Aghlabid dynasty was therefore bound to have repercussions there, all the more so given that the Sicilians did not take it for granted. Even though we lack precise documentation, Palermo would seem to have played an important role in the Sicilians' initial rejection of Fatimid authority, at that time embodied in al-Ḥasan b. Aḥmad b. Ibn Abī Khinzīr, one of the principal members of the Kutāma tribe, ex-governor of Kairouan, emir designate of Sicily, from 910–11. His replacement met with just as much hostility, which led in May 913<sup>25</sup> to Ibn Qurhub being designated Emir of Sicily by the local population or in the main, there is good reason to suppose, by Palermitans.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, it was also in the capital that the superintendent of the Quint was assassinated, in January 913,<sup>27</sup> an event presaging the breach with the Fatimids. Conversely, Ibn Qurhub, who took up again with the Abassids, was less concerned with Palermo than with operations against the Christians in the eastern part of the island, and then against the Fatimids. For three years, up until his death in 916—he was executed by the Fatimids—Ibn Qurhub was also in conflict with a section of the population that was hostile to him, and, for its part, called upon the Fatimids to restore order.<sup>28</sup> The exact role played by the Palermitans in the eventual downfall of Ibn Qurhub is not clear, any more than their precise motivations are, but the opposition to the Emir did in fact extend well beyond the capital. The Palermitans were nonetheless not yet prepared to submit to the authority of the Fatimids, a fact reflected in their opposition to the Caliph's representative sent immediately after the

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<sup>24</sup> See Alessandra Bagnera's article in the present volume. See also Elena Pezzini's article, in this volume.

<sup>25</sup> *Chronique de Cambridge*, BAS ar., 1: 194 and BAS it., 1: 281.

<sup>26</sup> Ibn al-Athīr, *Kitāb al-Kāmil*, BAS ar., 1: 295–297 and BAS it., 1: 408–410.

<sup>27</sup> *Chronique de Cambridge*, BAS ar., 1: 194 and BAS it., 1: 281.

<sup>28</sup> Ibn al-Athīr, *Kitāb al-Kāmil*, BAS ar., 1: 297 and BAS it., 1: 297.

rebel emir's death, and in the punishment inflicted upon them: they were subjected to a six months' siege prior to being granted *amān*.<sup>29</sup>

Palermo then returned to the Fatimid fold, and there it would remain, without interruption, until the end of the 1030s. The mid-930s would once again represent an important stage in the city's development, in the urbanistic sense as much as in anything else. Taking advantage of the Agrigrentans' rebellion against the local representative of the Fatimids, Palermo rose up against the Emir Sālim. The revolt was savagely put down by Khalīl b. Iṣḥāq, who had been dispatched to the spot by the Caliph. From 937–38 onwards the latter had a fortified city, the Khālīṣa,<sup>30</sup> built near to the coast to accommodate the representatives of the Fatimids, a construction financed in part by taxes levied on the population at large. Control over the island was regained through an army composed in part of Kutāma Berbers and of representatives of the Kalbid family, two groups that were loyal supporters of the Fatimids.<sup>31</sup>

It was in fact from the Kalbids that there issued the dynasty that ruled Islamic Sicily the longest. In power from 947–48 to around 1040, virtually without interruption, these latter claimed to be of Arab descent, a claim easier to promote in Palermo—a city whose elites were, as in the Ifrīqiyān capital, in large part linked to the *jund* and likewise claimed Arab descent—than a Berber origin, such as that of the Kutāma, would have been. In this context, the Kalbids could rely upon three advantages, namely, their mythical (Southern) Arab origin, their recent, clearly identified, Maghrebian, and not Eastern origin (whereas in the Maghreb it was the Fatimids who were identified as Eastern) and their role as pillars of the regime.<sup>32</sup>

The sources are unanimous in crediting the Kalbids with the capacity to restore order to a Sicily devastated by internal divisions and by a sequence

<sup>29</sup> *Chronique de Cambridge*, BAS ar., 1: 195 and BAS it., 1: 282.

<sup>30</sup> See Alessandra Bagnera's contribution to the present volume for a discussion of the material aspects of the Khālīṣa's construction.

<sup>31</sup> On this point, it is worth consulting Farhat Dachraoui, *Le califat fatimide au Maghreb (296–365 H/909–975 J.C.)*. *Histoire politique et institutions* (Tunis, 1981), Michael Brett, *The Rise of the Fatimids. The World of the Mediterranean and the Middle East in the Tenth Century CE* (Leiden-Cologne-Boston, 2001) and Sumaiya A. Hamdani, *Between Revolution and State. The Path to Fatimid Statehood. Qadi al-Nu'man and the Construction of Fatimid Legitimacy* (London, 2006).

<sup>32</sup> In Egypt they were identified as "Westerners" (*Maghārība*). Paul E. Walker, "Kutāma, Kalbids and other Westerners: the Maghārība in Cairo," in *Atti del Convegno 'I Fatimidi e il Mediterraneo'*, *Alifbâ* 22 (2008) (<http://issuu.com/accademialibica/docs/alifbaxii>), 45–57.



of famines, and it is this which no doubt accounts for their longevity.<sup>33</sup> They would seem in the process to have centralized the island's government, thereby enhancing the role of Palermo. In his biography of al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī b. Abī al-Ḥusayn, considered to be the founder of the Kalbid dynasty in Sicily, al-Maqrīzī in fact specifies: "When he arrived in Sicily, al-Ḥasan dismissed the *ʿummāl* (tax-collectors) and concentrated power in his own hands and in those of his descendants."<sup>34</sup> It was also under this dynasty that Sicily passed wholly under the control of the Muslims and, as in the Aghlabid period, *jihād* seems to have played an important role in legitimizing the Fatimids and their local representatives.<sup>35</sup>

The Sicilian elites gradually came to terms with the new authorities. In 960–61 we thus see Ḥasan, who had ceased to be Emir and had handed over power to his son Aḥmad, bringing the representatives of the Sicilian (in all likelihood, Palermitan) elites with him to Ifrīqiya in order to initiate them into Ismāʿīlism.<sup>36</sup> We know that by this means, involving the granting of titles such as *dāʿī* ("preacher," implicitly belonging to the Ismāʿīli movement) or *dāʿī al-duʿāt* ("preacher of preachers"), it became possible to integrate the elites and authorities of more or less distant regions into the Fatimid Empire by inserting them into a sort of honorific hierarchy.<sup>37</sup>

#### *Kalbid and Fatimid Palermo*

*(Middle of the 10th Century–Middle of the 11th Century)*

Whilst the history of 10th-century Palermo is undoubtedly better documented, we are hardly more able to specify the precise limits of the Khālīṣa, and the siting of the Emiral Palace within it,<sup>38</sup> than we were to identify the exact position of this latter in the Aghlabid period, though it probably lay within the old city. The Kalbid epoch would nevertheless seem to have been one of prosperity and expansion for the Sicilian city. Indeed, Sicilian poetic production of the 10th and 11th century shows, to

<sup>33</sup> *Cambridge Chronicle*, BAS ar., 1: 200 et BAS it., 1: 289.

<sup>34</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Muqaffā* (Beirut, 1987), pp. 184–185.

<sup>35</sup> Antonino Pellitteri, "The Historical-ideological Framework of Islamic Fatimid Sicily (Fourth/Tenth century) with reference to the works of the Qāḍī Nuʿmān," *Al-Masāq* 7 (1995), 111–163.

<sup>36</sup> *Chronique de Cambridge*, BAS ar., 1: 202 and BAS it., 1: 292.

<sup>37</sup> Even if there is no specific reference to Sicily in this regard.

<sup>38</sup> The anonymous cosmography entitled *Kitāb Gharāʾib al-funūn* even defines the Khālīṣa, in the legend accompanying a domed building representing it on the map of Sicily, as "the fortress of power" (*qaṣr al-sultān*), [where] its residence and its slaves [are situated]". See *Kitāb Gharāʾib*, fig. 6 (illustration) and p. 444.

judge by the identity of the poets and the content of their compositions,<sup>39</sup> that the Fatimid Court was a by no means negligible cultural centre. The second half of the 10th century was a period of real significance in urbanistic terms: in 967, the city walls were reinforced<sup>40</sup> and, at the end of the century, an entire quarter was built, probably at the instigation of Emir Ja'far b. Yūsuf (998–1019).<sup>41</sup>

Such was the context within which Palermo was to witness a number of decisive political events, which served to emphasize its integration into the contemporary political context. Thus, in 947, the city was disturbed by the intrigues of the Banū al-Ṭabārī,<sup>42</sup> members of the Palermitan elites since the Aghlabid period, which led to a Kalbid emir, al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī b. Abī al-Ḥusayn, being dispatched to Palermo in order to restore order.<sup>43</sup> These events would seem to be best read not in terms of ethnic and tribal divisions (Arabs against Berbers, local peoples against conquerors, etc.), but as a reflection of tensions between the political parties that proliferated during the Fatimid period. The Ṭabārī and their allies had somehow to find their place within the new political dispensation, and were endeavouring to preserve their role in the political life of the city. The Kalbid settlement can hardly be said to have been in their favour: the most eminent of their number were forced out of the political arena, killed and their property confiscated. The remaining elites were subsumed within the new groups dominant in public life.<sup>44</sup>

A subsequent echo of these tensions would seem to be perceptible in events that unfolded twenty years later. Thus, in 968–69, the Kalbid Emir

<sup>39</sup> On this point see Mirella Cassarino's article in the present volume.

<sup>40</sup> This step should be seen in the context of a general fortification of Sicily, see al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-'Arab*, BAS, ar., 2: 494 and BAS it., 2: 134.

<sup>41</sup> Two largescale developments would seem to be attributable to him, namely, the quarter "of al-Tājī with its walls" and al-Ja'fariyya, which is reckoned to have contained some 10,000 houses. These two pieces of information derive from the *Kitāb Gharā'ib al-funūn* and have been analysed in Alessandra Bagnera and Annliese Nef, "Histoire et archéologie du domaine fatimide: la Sicile et Palerme (début du X<sup>e</sup> siècle–milieu du XI<sup>e</sup> siècle)," in Patrice Cressier and Mourad Rammah, eds., *Ṣabra al-Manṣūrīyya*, Collection de l'École française de Rome, Rome, forthcoming. See also Alessandra Bagnera's contribution to the present volume.

<sup>42</sup> Muḥammad Kāmil Ḥusayn et Muḥammad 'Abd al-Hādī Sha'ira, eds., Abū 'Alī al-Manṣūr al-Jawdhārī, *Sīrat Ustādh Jawdhar* (Cairo, 1954) and *Vie de l'ustādh Jaudhar, contenant sermons, lettres et rescrits des premiers califes fātimites, écrite par Mansūr le Secrétaire*, transl. Marius Canard (Algiers, 1958), pp. 71–72 Arabic version and pp. 103–104 French version.

<sup>43</sup> This latter had just proved himself against Abū Yazīd in Ifrīqiya. See Ibn al-Athīr, *Kitāb al-Kāmil*, BAS ar., 1: 300–302 and BAS it., 1: 415–419.

<sup>44</sup> Ibn al-Athīr, *Kitāb al-Kāmil*, BAS ar., 1: 302 and BAS it., 1: 419.

of the island, Aḥmad, was recalled by the Fatimid Caliph, leaving behind a *mawlā*<sup>45</sup> belonging to the dynasty, Yaʿīsh.<sup>46</sup> It is possible that this apparent relaxation of Fatimid authority over the island prompted the *qabāʾil* (tribes, clans) to assemble in the arsenal in order to confront the *mawālī* of the Kutāma, the famous Berber tribe, the first to be won over to the Fatimids in the West, and one that had arrived on the island in the baggage train, so to speak, of the Fatimids.<sup>47</sup> Here too the episode would seem to reflect tensions between groups engaged in a power struggle: the *qabāʾil* had found themselves on the losing side, with the Kutāma, in particular, profiting from their exclusion from Emiral spheres of influence. We thus find that the partisan logics operative at the Caliphal Court were likewise at work in the regional capitals of the Fatimid Empire, where factions strove to maintain or establish their power. These events also suggest that the restoration of order of 947–48 had not completely eliminated the party then in power, and which defined itself as, amongst other things, “Arab,” just as they show that the Kalbids relied subsequently on the Kutāma, or their clients, who were very much in evidence on the island. Ibn al-Athīr even went so far as to specify that the clashes extended to Syracuse, where some of the *mawālī* of the Kutāma resided, and to the rest of the island, but in a form unknown to us.<sup>48</sup> It is nonetheless worth noting that it all began in Palermo. In the wake of these events, the Caliph dispatched Abū-l-Qāsim, Aḥmad’s brother, to Sicily, to wield power in the name of his brother, and, at his death, in 970, to succeed him as Emir.<sup>49</sup>

It is impossible to decide whether the Fatimids’ opponents saw the start of the conquest of Egypt in 969 as an opportunity to shake off Caliphal authority, although it is reasonable to suppose that the transfer of the Caliphal court to Cairo had some impact. Certainly, the Zirids, to whom the Ifrīqiyan Emirate had been entrusted, were the Fatimids’ most direct representatives, and relations between the island and Ifrīqiya continued to be of crucial importance, but links would remain close between the Kalbids and the Fatimids, and Sicily had incontestably been integrated into a political entity that was larger and in full expansion.

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<sup>45</sup> *Mawlā* (pl. *mawālī*). The meaning of this term is complex and varies over the course of Islam’s history, but it refers to the notion of clientship.

<sup>46</sup> See al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-ʿArab*, BAS ar., 2: 495 and BAS it., 2: 135–136.

<sup>47</sup> Ibn al-Athīr, *Kitāb al-Kāmil*, BAS ar., 1: 308–309 and BAS it., 1: 429–430.

<sup>48</sup> Ibn al-Athīr, *Kitāb al-Kāmil*, BAS ar., 1: 308 and BAS it., 1: 429.

<sup>49</sup> See al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-ʿArab*, BAS ar., 2: 495 and BAS it., 2: 135–136.

Up until 1014, the Sicilian—and, more particularly, the Palermitan—political situation was characterized by its calm and stability, and by a relative lack of sources. After this date, and up until the end of the 1030s, the key events tended to unfold in Palermo, which had become the undisputed centre of political life on the island, though with alternating periods of tension and calm. Without going into detail, I would simply note that various members of the Kalbid family clashed in a struggle in the course of which the backing of different political factions, defined in a different fashion to the one we have just recalled for the 10th century, was a major issue.<sup>50</sup>

*The End of Palermo's Centrality and the Norman Advance*

It was at the end of the 1030s that Palermo's role as capital of Sicily came to an end. What we then find is the emergence of autonomous political units, each with its centre in one of the island's main cities but encompassing the regions surrounding it. This development, the chronological detail for which is hazy, led to the following situation:<sup>51</sup> Ibn Mankūt held the cities of Mazara, Trapani, Sciacca and Marsala, in short the West of Sicily; Ibn al-Hawwās held Castrogiovanni, Castronuovo and Agrigento, or the centre and south of the island, until Ibn Ḥammūd gained control of this latter city, at the end of the century at the latest; Ibn al-Thumna controlled Syracuse, and Noto in the east of the island; Ibn Maklātī held Catania, until Ibn al-Thumna wrested it from him. As for Palermo, if al-Nuwayrī—the only author to give this information—is to be believed, its government reverted to its *shuyūkh*.<sup>52</sup> This fact is confirmed by a letter found in the Geniza, decipherable only in part and dated approximately to 1045, which refers to a town that is *taḥt shūrā* (literally “under [the authority of a] council”).<sup>53</sup>

This is a point worth developing, given the fact that historians have posited a degree of continuity between the institution and an earlier

<sup>50</sup> Annliese Nef, “La désignation des groupes ethniques de la Sicile islamique dans les chroniques en langue arabe: source d'information ou *topos*?”, *Annales islamologiques* 42 (2008), 57–72.

<sup>51</sup> Ibn al-Athīr, *Kitāb al-Kāmil*, *BAS ar.*, 1: 318 and *BAS it.*, 1: 445–446 and al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-'Arab*, *BAS ar.*, 2: 498 and *BAS it.*, 2: 142.

<sup>52</sup> Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-'Arab*, *BAS ar.*, 2: 498 and *BAS it.*, 2: 142.

<sup>53</sup> Moshe Gil, “Sicily 827–1072, in Light of the Geniza Documents and Parallel Sources,” in *Gli ebrei in Sicilia sino all'espulsione del 1492 (Atti del V Convegno internazionale Italia Judaica, Palermo, 15–19 juin 1992)*, Pubblicazioni degli Archivi di Stato, Saggi, 32 (Rome, 1995), pp. 96–171, esp. p. 116.

municipal government in Palermo, parallel to that of the Emirate and attested now and then from the 10th century onwards.<sup>54</sup> This notion stems directly from Michele Amari's interpretation of the sources, an interpretation which lays stress upon the existence of a local *jamā'a* (interpreted as a council operating at city level). In reality, nothing in the sources lends credence to this hypothesis. Admittedly, there is evidence for regular intervention on the part of the capital's elites (*ayān*) or the *shuyūkh* (the "elders," but more broadly "the best"), which were entitled to form delegations in order to appear before the Caliph—or before his envoys, or before the new Emir upon his arrival on the island, or, more particularly, in close proximity to the city, in the aftermath of a rebellion—in order to voice criticisms of emiral authority.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, the formula used by al-Nuwayrī in relation to Palermo around 1040 bears out this supposition.<sup>56</sup> On the other hand, the institutional dimension conferred upon this reality by Michele Amari reflects first and foremost his republicanism, and his concern to identify a communal past in Sicily, enabling it to be integrated into an Italy which was on the way to being unified.<sup>57</sup> The political role

<sup>54</sup> De Simone, "Il periodo arabo . . .", p. 81.

<sup>55</sup> Sources vary in the amount of detail they give about these delegations (not all attestations are listed here): simple groups of *shuyūkh* (in 900, Ibn al-Athīr, *Kitāb al-kāmil*, BAS ar., 1: 291: *fa-arsalū jamā'a min shuyūkhi-him ilayhi*, "they sent him a group of their *shuyūkh*" and BAS it., 1: 401; in 937, Ibn al-Athīr, *Kitāb al-kāmil*, BAS ar., 1: 299: delegation of women and children, and BAS it., 1: 414); representatives of opposed political factions (in 947–948, different factions went to seek out al-Ḥasan, the first Kalbid sent to the island, on his arrival in Mazara: Ibn al-Athīr, *Kitāb al-kāmil*, BAS ar., 1: 301 and BAS, it., 1: 417); or city officials (in 947–948, when al-Ḥasan drew close to Palermo, Ibn al-Athīr, *Kitāb al-kāmil*, BAS ar., 1: 301 and BAS it., 1: 417–418).

<sup>56</sup> Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-'Arab*, BAS ar., 2: 498 and BAS it., 2: 142. In Arabic, the formula reads as follows: *Fa-rajā'a amr ahl al-madīnati ilā al-mashā'ikh* [pl. of *shaykh*] *al-ladhīn bī-hā*: "government affairs in the city of Palermo were the responsibility of the *shuyūkh* who were there."

<sup>57</sup> Annliese Nef, "Michele Amari ou l'histoire inventée de la Sicile islamique: réflexions sur la *Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia*," in Benoît Grévin, ed., *Maghreb-Italie, des passeurs médiévaux à l'orientalisme moderne (XIII<sup>e</sup>-milieu XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, Collection de l'École française de Rome, 439 (Rome, 2010), pp. 285–306, esp. pp. 298–99. Michele Amari emphasises the tribal origins of this council, which with the passage of time becomes "municipio." A passage from his *Storia dei musulmani di Sicilia* is particularly revealing in this regard, since he there explains, on the basis of the truncated formula of al-Nuwayrī (see the previous note), that the Palermitans rid themselves of emiral authority in order to take control again of their own destiny: "We do not know why Simsām was driven from Palermo (. . .). He was neither a warrior nor a statesman, and he was too fond of acting the king in Palermo, or else he seemed to be of no use to the *gemā'* [transliteration of *jamā'a*]. They therefore told him to take his leave under God's protection, and they wished to attempt a republic . . .", Michele Amari, *Storia dei musulmani di Sicilia* (Florence, 1854–1872, new edition, 2002–2003), 2: 285.

of the Palermitan elites was therefore real, just as it was in the other great cities of the medieval Arab and Muslim world, but the interpretation in institutional terms, influenced by what had seemed in 19th century Italy to be a model, namely, the medieval commune, is no longer sustainable. Passages in the sources pertaining to Islamic Sicily and containing a reference to *jamā'a*, a highly polysemic term referring in a general fashion to a group,<sup>58</sup> demonstrate that this word never has the meaning there of “urban council.”<sup>59</sup>

If the Aghlabid period is less well-known from an economic point of view, even if we take into account the contributions of archaeology, the 10th to 11th centuries are by contrast characterized by a prosperity which must account, at any rate in part, for the interest shown by the Fatimids in Sicily.

#### THE ECONOMIC AND MONETARY INTEGRATION OF PALERMO INTO THE ZONE OF FATIMID PROSPERITY

The texts<sup>60</sup> at our disposal are too scanty for us to be able to draw up anything remotely resembling an exhaustive picture, yet the different types of sources turn out to complement one another, both in the information they provide and in their chronological spread. The geographical texts which describe the distribution of economic activities in the city date from the end of the 10th century, as does a text containing information drawn from sources close to the Caliphal authorities. There is, however, no evidence from the Cairo Geniza regarding trade networks prior to the 11th century.

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<sup>58</sup> Vanessa Van Renterghem, “Introduction” to the special issue *Groupes sociaux et catégorisation sociale dans le dār al-islām médiéval (VII<sup>e</sup>–XV<sup>e</sup> siècles)*, *Annales islamologiques* 42 (2008), XXIX–LI.

<sup>59</sup> I will simply cite here the passages highlighted by Michele Amari, the term being in common use. At the time of the events of 947–48, Ibn al-Athīr thus defines the Banū al-Ṭabārī as the “first (*a'yān*) of the community [i.e. ‘of the city’] (*jamā'a*)”, who enjoyed “a great deal of support (*atbā' kathīrūn*) in the city,” Ibn al-Athīr, *Kitāb al-Kāmil*, *BAS* ar., 1: 300 and *BAS* it., 1: 416; on another occasion (Ibn al-Athīr, *Kitāb al-Kāmil*, *BAS* ar., 1: 302 and *BAS* it., 1: 419), the term means, as Michele Amari himself concedes (*BAS* it., 1: 419, n. 1), “group,” assembled here around the Banū Ṭabārī.

<sup>60</sup> I will leave to one side here the archaeological evidence, which has yet to be analysed and synthesised.

*Trade and Artisanal Production in Palermo*

At the very start of his account of Palermo, when he is describing the ancient nucleus, the Norman Cassaro or the Islamic *Balarm*, Ibn Ḥawqal specifies that “merchants live [there],”<sup>61</sup> by contrast with the Khālīṣa, the area of the city associated with power. One wonders if these same merchants traded their wares along the paved *simāṭ* which crossed the town from east to west and was lined with businesses.<sup>62</sup> The Arabic term used here, *tājir* (pl. *tujjār*), generally designates an important merchant. Would the most important transactions and the trade in luxury goods have been concentrated in this quarter, in the heart of the city, where the political centre of the capital used formerly to be situated, leaving the other merchant sectors to the less central market-places?

In addition, Ibn Ḥawqal has left us a description of the Palermitan markets whose value is enhanced by the fact of his having been himself a merchant. They were situated for the most part between two quarters located outside the fortified heart of the town, the neighbourhoods of the Mosque Quarter and of the New Quarter.<sup>63</sup> The specialised merchants were clustered together, with there being a very short distance between the making and the selling of specific products. The Iraqi geographer then went on to list the artisans. In the neighbourhoods mentioned, he saw in close proximity sellers of oil, flour merchants, moneychangers, apothecaries, blacksmiths, cutlers, wheat merchants (*al-qamḥ*), embroiderers (*al-tirāziyūn*), fishmongers, grain merchants (*al-abzāriyūn*), a group (*tāʿifa*) of butchers, and vegetable and fruit sellers; sellers of fragrant plants; sellers of jars (*al-jarrārūn*), bakers, ropemakers, a group (*tāʿifa*) of ironmongers, butchers, shoemakers, tanners, joiners and potters (*al-ghaḍāʾirūn*). Wood sellers were for their part located outside the city. Finally, in the fortified heart of Palermo, that is to say, of the Aghlabid city, could be found a group (*tāʿifa*) of butchers, whose stalls were, according to this author, two hundred (!) in number, sellers of jars (*al-jarrārūn*), and shoemakers. Finally, in yet another market, located near to the end of the road traversing the whole *qaṣr*, were to be found a handful of butchers, some

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<sup>61</sup> Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb Ṣurat al-arḍ*, ed. Johan H. Kramers, (reed. Beirut, 1964), p. 113; Ibn Ḥawqal, *Configuration de la terre*, trad. Johan H. Kramers and Gaston Wiet (Beirut-Paris, 1964), p. 117.

<sup>62</sup> Ibn Ḥawqal, Arabic, p. 117 and French, p. 121.

<sup>63</sup> Ibn Ḥawqal, Arabic, p. 114 and French, p. 118.

cotton merchants, carders and cobblers. The outlying markets thus seem to be devoted more to food than their equivalents in the *Balarm* were.

A few years later, al-Muqaddasī claimed that the Khālīṣa also welcomed commercial activities, though Ibn Ḥawqal had ruled this out. In order to resolve this apparent contradiction, it has been argued that such activities might be linked to the presence of the Arsenal in this fortified part of the town, since it was in general enlivened by a fair number of warehouses.<sup>64</sup>

Aside from the above infrastructures, the city also featured sites intended to welcome merchants coming from abroad. These lodging-houses, called *fundūq-s*, are documented in two letters of the Cairo Geniza dating from the 11th century.<sup>65</sup> The Sicilian capital would therefore seem to have been an important commercial and artisanal centre, and a source of by no means negligible fiscal revenues.

Finally, a number of Palermo's productive activities are described separately from its trade and markets: the Wadī 'Abbās (present-day Oreto) and other watercourses were, Ibn Ḥawqal records, lined with mills and with orchards and kitchen gardens producing fruit and vegetables (in particular, cucumbers).<sup>66</sup> Moreover, in marshy areas on the edge of the city, along the watercourses oriented east to west, there grew sugar cane and papyrus serving in part to produce the rolls needed for official documents, but which for the most part were used to make ships' anchors and cables.<sup>67</sup> Finally, a state-owned iron mine close to the city provided the raw materials for metals needed on boats.<sup>68</sup>

The question then arises as to whether Palermo was also a commercial hub at the regional level.

#### *Palermo and the Economic Circuits of the Central Mediterranean*

So far as the 10th century is concerned, the sources do not permit a detailed answer to this question. Indeed, the small number of *fatwā-s* mentioning the island before the Norman period never refer to any cities by name. By the same token, whilst the biography of the eunuch Jawdhār, servant of

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<sup>64</sup> Geographers and chroniclers frequently mention the arsenal, but they do not situate it precisely, if one excepts Ibn Ḥawqal, who places it inside the Khālīṣa. Nowadays there is, generally speaking, a tendency to situate it on the same level as the present-day Piazza Marina. See Alessandra Bagnera et Annliese Nef, "Histoire et archéologie du domaine fatimide."

<sup>65</sup> Adalgisa De Simone, "Palermo arabo," p. 96.

<sup>66</sup> Ibn Ḥawqal, Arabic, p. 114 and p. 117 and French, p. 118 and p. 121.

<sup>67</sup> Ibn Ḥawqal, Arabic, p. 117 and French, p. 121.

<sup>68</sup> Ibn Ḥawqal, Arabic, p. 117 and French, p. 122.



the Fatimid Caliph until 973, written by one of the slaves closest to him, contains some important details, they are very incomplete. This work, whose value consists, amongst other things, in the fact that it contains a good number of official letters and documents drafted at the behest of the Caliph and of those close to him, casts a particular light upon the intertwining of the spheres of government and of large-scale trade during the Ifrīqiyan period of the Fatimid government,<sup>69</sup> in particular through the agency of Jawdhār. Yet it also reflects, more broadly, Sicily's place in the trade with Ifrīqiya, and at the very highest level. Amongst the commodities coming from Sicily we find mention of wood, a strategic material if ever there was one, above all in the context of the policy of maritime and commercial expansion pursued by the Fatimids, and of barley. Palermo features in this text in its own right but above all as a political centre, and more particularly as the headquarters of the Sicilian treasury.

As for the 11th century, the information we have is somewhat more precise, thanks to the light shed upon Palermo by numerous documents from the Cairo Geniza.<sup>70</sup> These documents are for the most part concentrated in the second half of the century (93 out of 156 letters, with 36 being dated to the first half of the century). Of 110 journeys<sup>71</sup> which include Sicily in one way or another and are known to us through documents now published, 35 pass directly by way of Palermo or have this city as their ultimate destination, that is to say, a good third, but we should note that in 15 cases it is Mazara that is mentioned. Palermo is therefore in the lead, but more often the destination is Sicily in a general sense. Of these

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<sup>69</sup> Let us cite in this regard: a letter from al-Mu'izz, which relates that the *mutawallī l-baḥr* of Mahdiyya has written to Jawdhār complaining about having been defamed by a Tripolitan who accuses him of defrauding him over the barley that the sultan had asked him to bring into Sicily for the *ghāzī-s*, and asking Jawdhār to intervene on his behalf with the caliph [Abū 'Alī al-Manṣūr al-Jawdhārī, *Sīrat Ustādh Jawdhar*, p. 87 and *Vie de l'ustādh Jaudhar*, p. 127]; a letter that mentions the wood surrendered by the inhabitants of Taormina and of Rometta (p. 117 Arabic version and pp. 175–76 French version); another letter which describes wood transported by Jawdhār himself, who offers it to the Caliph for his arsenal (p. 121 Arabic version and p. 183 French version); a detailed missive requested by Jawdhār from the governor of Sicily in order to finish loading his boat in Palermo while deducting a sum (100 *dīnār-s*) from the Sicilian Treasury to cover reimbursement costs (pp. 135–136 Arabic version and pp. 206–208 French version).

<sup>70</sup> These documents were published in Moshe Ben Sasson, *The Jews of Sicily (825–1068)*, (Jerusalem, 1991) (in Hebrew), and their translated versions are in Shlomo Simonsohn, *The Jews in Sicily. I: 383–1300* (Leiden-New York-Cologne, 1997).

<sup>71</sup> See Annliese Nef, "La Sicile dans la documentation de la Geniza cairote (fin x<sup>e</sup>–xiii<sup>e</sup>): les réseaux attestés et leur nature," in Damien Coulon, Christophe Picard, Dominique Valérian, eds., *Espaces et réseaux en Méditerranée (VI<sup>e</sup>–XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, vol. 1. *La configuration des réseaux* (Paris, 2007), pp. 273–92.

35 journeys,<sup>72</sup> 14 linked Palermo to Egypt, 6 to Fustāt, 6 to Alexandria, 2 to Sfax and 2 to al-Mahdiyya, 1 to Tripoli and 5 to other Sicilian localities, or in other words 26 to Egypt, 5 to Ifrīqiya and 5 to Sicily. The reduced share of Ifrīqiya reflects both the effects of the region's disrupted relationship with Fatimid Egypt in the middle of the 11th century and the growing instability of this zone occasioned by the movement of nomadic tribes from Egypt towards Ifrīqiya, a movement traditionally designated by the expression "Hilalian invasion."

There is, however, another source relating to the first half of the 11th century which suggests that Ifrīqiya remained important for Palermitan trade and perhaps politically also,<sup>73</sup> despite the shift in the Fatimid centre of gravity towards Cairo in 973 and the strong political ties between this capital and Palermo. We are concerned here with the anonymous *Kitāb gharā'ib al-funūn*, the existence of which was brought to the attention of historians of Sicily by Jeremy Johns.<sup>74</sup> This work is a cosmography, two parts of which are held in Oxford. The first one is devoted to the influence of stars upon the different regions of the world, while the second clearly concentrates upon maritime spaces, ports and watercourses. Now we find in the latter not only an unpublished map of Sicily, which contains new elements but whose commentary is heavily inspired by Ibn Ḥawqal, but also a maritime itinerary from al-Mahdiyya to Palermo.<sup>75</sup> The very fact of such an itinerary being there, together with its marked resemblance to a navigation chart, and one with several distinctive features—a map of al-Mahdiyya, which is highly schematic, is accompanied by a list of anchorages (*marāsi*) between the two cities—suggests that this route was often taken. It comprised the following stages: al-Mahdiyya, al-B.rṭūl (Monastir?), Sousse, Harqlīya, H.r.qūn, al-Marṣad, al-Manāra, Nabeul?, Q.s.r.na, Qaṣr Sa'īd, Qaṣr Labna, Iqlibiyya, Qaṣr Nūb, all ports situated on the Ifrīqiyān coast, then Pantelleria, and on the Sicilian coast, Mazara, Rā's al-N.b.ra (Capo Boeo?), Favignana, Trapani, Capo San Vito, Madinat

<sup>72</sup> I do not take into account here the various stages, very few of which are mentioned. For further details, see *ibid.*, pp. 285–86.

<sup>73</sup> Unless this work presents a fixed image referring to an earlier period. It is in fact clear that between 916, the end of Ibn Qurhub's rebellion, and at least 973, that is, for over fifty years, Sicily was genuinely the second pillar of the Fatimid economic and political world.

<sup>74</sup> Johns, "Una nuova fonte per la geografia...".

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 448–449; online manuscript, illustration at f° 34a, and at the following Internet link: [http://cosmos.bodley.ox.ac.uk/hms/mss\\_browse.php?expand=732,803&state=main&act=chfolio&folio=60](http://cosmos.bodley.ox.ac.uk/hms/mss_browse.php?expand=732,803&state=main&act=chfolio&folio=60).

Mariyā, Şiqilliyya (i.e. Palermo). This necklace of anchorages, whose beads are told by the author, points to a mode of travel resembling coasting between the two regional capitals—even if they were not necessary stages in the route taken—and to exchanges intense enough to give rise to this precise knowledge.

The question of Palermitan minting of currency<sup>76</sup> has still to be studied in detail, and the fact that the quarter dinars (the *rubāʿī-s*) that proliferate from the reign of Ibrāhīm II (875–902) do not bear a workshop name prior to the reign of the Fatimid Caliph al-Manşūr (946–953) is no help in this respect. Minting probably began early, but the first striking, in silver, known for Sicily (*bi-Şiqilliya*, with a *sin* and not a *şad*), dating from 829, cannot be attributed to Palermo, nor with any certainty can those which, throughout the following decade, bear the same inscription.<sup>77</sup> What is certain is that under the Aghlabid Emir Muḥammad I (841–56), at least as early as 845, some coins were struck at Palermo, then called *Madīnat Balarm*. From the reign of al-Manşūr we know for certain that gold pieces (quarter dinars) were struck at Palermo, then known as *Madīnat Şiqilliya*, and from the time of al-Muʿizz (953–75) as *Şiqilliya*. We know that the city was designated by these different Arabic names (see *supra*), but one can however suppose that this gradual development justifies our insisting that Sicilian minting was centralized in Palermo throughout the Emiral period. Unfortunately, there is insufficient data for us to be able to assess the area across which currencies struck in Palermo circulated. On the other hand, the strongly symbolic dimension of this minting is proven by the existence of coins struck in the name of Aḥmad b. Qurhub in the period when he was emir.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>76</sup> For a synoptic account of Islamic currency in Sicily, one could consult Paul Balog, “La monetazione della Sicilia araba e le sue imitazioni nell’Italia meridionale,” in Gabrieli-Scerrato, pp. 611–16.

<sup>77</sup> For a different opinion, see Philip Grierson and Lucia Travaini, *Medieval European Coinage, with a catalogue of the coins in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. 14 Italy (III, South Italy, Sicily, Sardinia)* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 74.

<sup>78</sup> Bartolomeo Lagumina, “Di un pregevole ripostiglio di monete arabe trovato a Palermo,” *Archivio Storico Siciliano* 20 (1895), 360–374.

A RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL CAPITAL OF THE *DĀR AL-ISLĀM*

This aspect is of real importance because it allows us to assess the capital's religious development, and also its role as a cultural centre of the *dār al-islām*, particularly in a regional context.

*A Religious Pole of Attraction*

Palermo would seem to have been a religious centre with quite specific characteristics. Thus, al-Harāwī, who in the 12th century wrote a guide to the pilgrimage sites of the *dār al-islām*, briefly mentions Sicily, but never Palermo as such, save, in passing, the 'Ayn al-Shifā mosque, where he underwent a cure: which therefore means that he did visit this city and that he would not have failed to mention any noteworthy fact pertaining to this theme. The only detail of this kind available to us comes from Ibn Ḥawqal, who recalls that veneration was accorded to a tomb, attributed by the local inhabitants to Aristotle, in the great mosque of Palermo, which was simply the city's converted cathedral,<sup>79</sup> but this veneration represented the continuation of an earlier practice, though certainly now Islamicized.

On the other hand, in the 10th century, Ibn Ḥawqal, who was only too ready to criticize the Sicilians, and their imperfect mastery of Islamic culture in particular, emphasises the sheer density of Muslim places of worship in Palermo, proposing the number of 300 mosques.<sup>80</sup> He also asserts that the city's environs were well supplied with such sites.<sup>81</sup> Ibn Ḥawqal then specifies that the number of *ribāt-s* on the coast was very high, but this in the course of describing Palermo, and we can therefore presume that he is referring here to the Palermitan coast and the adjacent areas.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, a number of examples are recorded later, notably by Ibn Jubayr, but one can infer that they were in existence prior to the 12th century.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>79</sup> Ibn Ḥawqal in Arabic, p. 115 and Ibn Ḥawqal in French, pp. 118–119.

<sup>80</sup> Ibn Ḥawqal in Arabic, p. 115 and Ibn Ḥawqal in French, p. 119.

<sup>81</sup> Ibn Ḥawqal in Arabic, p. 115 and Ibn Ḥawqal in French, p. 120.

<sup>82</sup> Ibn Ḥawqal in Arabic, p. 116 and Ibn Ḥawqal in French, p. 120. In contrast to the French version, which specifies "en Sicile," the Arabic specifies *bi-hā*; now in the previous passage it is Palermo that is mentioned, and the *hā* can only refer to that city. Note that the author's judgement of these *ribāt-s* is hardly positive.

<sup>83</sup> He thus mentions Qaṣr Ṣa'd et Qaṣr Ja'far to the east of Palermo, see Michael Johan De Goeje, ed., Ibn Jubayr, *Rihla* (new edition, Beirut, 1959), p. 303 and "Relation de

### *A Cultural Centre*

In the books of *ṭabaqāt*, or biographical dictionaries, Palermo is cast as one of the cultural centres of Ifrīqiya. Accounts of this region are invariably followed by a reference to the city, and the latter did indeed maintain multiple links with Ifrīqiya. Palermo did nevertheless develop its own space of intellectual formation and production, especially from the 11th century onwards, if the relevant sources are to be believed.<sup>84</sup> One can therefore appreciate the importance of the Kalbid court, even if it would not do to exaggerate the link between this latter and the cultural development of Palermo and Sicily.<sup>85</sup> Conversely, any indication of Palermo's influence extending beyond the island, or beyond Ifrīqiya, is missing from the sources, except every now and then: there is no scholar whose name one might cite systematically, and who was linked to the region, or a specific tendency associated with it.

This does not of course mean that nothing was happening in Palermo, since scholars from the region, or those in search of a place of refuge (notably from al-Andalus in the 11th century), willingly stayed there for periods of time. In a more general fashion, Ibn Ḥawqal's description, like the biographical dictionaries, enables us to catch a glimpse, between the end of the 9th century and the end of the 10th century, of a structured Palermitan milieu of judges,<sup>86</sup> notaries and witnesses. It was in Ifrīqiya, certainly, that the *qāḍī-s* known to us were legally trained, but in this regard too Palermo appears to have been a place to which they came to practise their expertise.

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voyages," translated by P. Charles-Dominique, in *Voyageurs arabes. Ibn Fadlān, Ibn Jubayr, Ibn Battūta et un auteur anonyme* (Paris, 1995), pp. 350–351.

<sup>84</sup> Annliese Nef, "Les élites savantes urbaines dans la Sicile islamique d'après les dictionnaires biographiques arabes," in Alessandra Molinari and Annliese Nef, eds., *La Sicile islamique. Questions de méthode et renouvellement récent des problématiques (Actes de la table ronde de Rome, 25 et 26 octobre 2002)*, *MEFRM* 116/1 (2004), 451–470. In that same year another article was published on this same topic, see William Granara, "Islamic Education and the Transmission of Knowledge in Muslim Sicily," in Joseph E. Lowry, Devin J. Stewart and Shawkat M. Toorawa, eds., *Law and Education in Medieval Islam. Studies in memory of Professor George Makdisi* (Chippenham, 2004), pp. 150–73, esp. pp. 162–73. On this particular point, the two articles are in complete agreement.

<sup>85</sup> For a contrasting point of view, see William Granara, "Rethinking Muslim Sicily's Golden Age: Poetry and Patronage at the Fatimid Kalbid Court," in *Atti del Convegno 'I Fatimidi e il Mediterraneo'*, pp. 95–108.

<sup>86</sup> Nine names of *qāḍī-s* in Sicily, whose headquarters were in Palermo, are known to us from works of *ṭabaqāt*; Ibn Ḥawqal knew of three others from Palermo, all of them belonging to the period running from the 860s to the 980s, and above all from the 10th century.

In a certain sense, the patchy information we have regarding a Koran copied in 982–83 in Palermo (*Madīnat Ṣiqīliyya*)<sup>87</sup> bears out the above supposition.<sup>88</sup> Analysis of the decoration of this volume has brought to light formal characteristics which recur in a series of Korans attributed to the Ifrīqiya-Sicily region and to the Fatimid period, and more precisely to the 10th century, as if pointing to the existence of a genuine regional school. Likewise, from a palaeographic point of view, the Koran features one of the variants identified in the Islamic West in this period, namely, an Abassid academic script.<sup>89</sup> It has been pointed out that this volume, whose copyist is anonymous, expresses at the beginning of the manuscript an anti-muʿtazilite position, since a phrase there defines the Koran as the word of God.<sup>90</sup> There is a temptation to see this as a response to an opinion widely held in Palermo at this period, but there is no guarantee that this is so. However, we can see it as an indication that the Palermitan elites were involved in the debates traversing the *dār al-islām* during this period.

Far from highlighting things peculiar to Palermo and Sicily, the information at our disposal thus gives us the impression that city and island alike were integrated into the cultural and religious life of the region and, more broadly, of the *dār al-islām*.

### Conclusion

The Islamic period of the history of Palermo marks the moment at which this latter became the capital of the island of Sicily, a role it would lose from the 1040s to the 1110s—the date at which the Hautevilles abandoned Messina and settled in Palermo (choosing thus to give an Islamic dimension to their government)—but which it then maintained until the present day. Considering the sources as a whole, Palermo appears to be one of the important cities of the *dār al-islām*, as much politically and economically as culturally, participating on its own scale in the latter's polycentrism. The city was also one of the poles of Islamicization on the island of Sicily.

<sup>87</sup> It is worth noting that during the Fatimid period this name gradually came to be generally used both on coins and in literary sources, which suggests that it may henceforth have become the official designation of Palermo.

<sup>88</sup> François Déroche, "Cercles et entrelacs: format et décor des corans maghrébins médiévaux," *Comptes-rendus des séances de l'année-Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres* 145e année, 1 (2001), 593–620, esp. p. 606.

<sup>89</sup> Id., "Tradition et innovation dans la pratique de l'écriture au Maghreb pendant les IV<sup>e</sup>/X<sup>e</sup> et V<sup>e</sup>/XI<sup>e</sup> siècles," in *Numismatique, langues, écritures et arts du livre, spécificité des arts figurés (Actes du VIIe colloque international sur l'histoire et l'archéologie de l'Afrique du Nord, Nice, 21–31 oct. 1996)* (Paris, 1999), pp. 233–246, esp. p. 238.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 603.



FROM A SMALL TOWN TO A CAPITAL: THE URBAN EVOLUTION  
OF ISLAMIC PALERMO (9TH–MID-11TH CENTURY)

Alessandra Bagnera

Conquered in 831, we must suppose that Palermo's characteristics as the important capital of the *dār al-islām* took shape gradually, though it is only from the last quarter of the 10th century that we find it described in the Arabic sources. Only a lengthy process of development can in fact have given rise to the image of the city that is evoked in the first systematic description that has come down to us, thanks to Ibn Ḥawqal, who probably visited it in 973. This author in fact depicts the unmistakable features of a Mediterranean capital with a high demic density, characterised by an advanced urbanistic fabric and by vibrant economic and social structures integrated into the Fatimid economic and political framework.<sup>1</sup> The city's image would retain such features both in the description made by al-Muqaddasī in 985<sup>2</sup> and in the later, enhanced one furnished, around the middle of the 11th century, by the *Kitāb Gharā'ib al-funūn wa-mulaḥ al-'uyūn* (*The book of the curiosities of the sciences and of marvels for the eyes*), an anonymous treatise of cosmography featuring, amongst other things, a profoundly interesting map of Sicily.<sup>3</sup> As is already intimated by the account of al-Idrīsī (circa 1160)—who, since he was resident at the court of Roger II, certainly provides us with first-hand information—the urban form developed in Palermo in the Islamic period continued to shape the Norman city.<sup>4</sup>

It is not a simple task, however, to reconstruct the duration, scale and nature of the various stages of the Islamic city's development, on account of a more general lack both of written sources and of reliable archaeological markers = archeological evidence allowing us to document from

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<sup>1</sup> Ibn Ḥawqal, *it.*, pp. 116–27. On the date of Ibn Ḥawqal's probable visit to Palermo see Adalgisa De Simone, "Palermo nei geografi e viaggiatori arabi nel medioevo," *Studi Maghrebini* 2 (1968), 129–89, in particular, pp. 130–31.

<sup>2</sup> Al-Muqaddasī, *BAS it.*, 2: 670–71.

<sup>3</sup> *Kitāb Gharā'ib*, *it.* and Jeremy Johns, "La nuova 'carta della Sicilia' e la topografia di Palermo," in Maria Andaloro, ed., *Nobiles Officinae. Perle, filigrane e trame di seta dal Palazzo Reale di Palermo* (Catania, 2006), II, pp. 15–23.

<sup>4</sup> Al-Idrīsī, *BAS it.*, 1: 59–62. On the Norman city see, in the present volume, the chapter by Elena Pezzini, with bibliography.



an early date the transformations affecting Sicily from the Islamic conquest onwards. As in the rest of the island, so too in Palermo, much of its history in this period is in shadow. We know all too little, in particular, about the 9th century, when the city was the seat of government of the Aghlabids of Ifrīqiya (831–909)<sup>5</sup> and again about the first half of the 10th century when, the latter having come under the newly constituted authority of the Fatimids, Sicily too became one of the territories subject to the powerful caliphs of the Shi'ite faith (910–948). So far as the immediately subsequent period is concerned, notable difficulties are occasioned by, in particular, the discrepancy evident between a picture that the sources justify us in representing as the outcome of a progressive process—with the direct intervention of the Fatimids seeming to be a decisive moment in the new urban structuration = urban form of the Sicilian capital—and the perspective derived from the archaeological evidence. The fact that the latter tends in the main to date from the second half of the 10th century leaves us with a monolithic picture of a reality in which almost all the events would in essence relate to the government of the Kalbids, a dynasty which was autonomous, though loyal to the Fatimids, and which ruled uninterruptedly from 948 to c. 1040. This situation derives from the system currently in use for the dating of the various phases within the Islamic period, a system which ties the main archaeological marker of such Islamic phases, namely glazed pottery with polychrome decoration, to the second half of the 10th century onwards. On the other hand, we are not yet in a position to assess whether, and if so, how some recent proposals to revise ceramic chronologies may give rise to new understandings of the history of urbanistic development in Palermo.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> On the reasons for such a choice, see in the present volume, Annliese Nef, "Islamic Palermo and the *dār al-islām*: politics, society and the economy (from the mid-9th to the mid-11th century)."

<sup>6</sup> For the proposed revision of the pottery chronologies, see Lucia Arcifa, Alessandra Bagnera, Annliese Nef, "L'archéologie de la Sicile islamique: un bilan en forme de questions," in Philippe Sénac, ed., *Villa 4, Histoire et archéologie de l'Occident musulman (VII<sup>e</sup>–XV<sup>e</sup> siècle)* (Toulouse, 2012), pp. 241–74, in particular paragraph 2, pp. 245–56; Alessandra Bagnera and Annliese Nef, "Histoire et Archéologie du domaine fatimide: la Sicile et Palerme (début du X<sup>e</sup>–milieu du XI<sup>e</sup> siècle)," in Patrice Cressier and Mourad Rammah, eds., *Šabra al-Manšūriyya. Capitale fatimide*, Collection de l'Ecole Française de Rome, Rome, in press, in particular paragraph IV. A summary of such arguments may be found in Alessandra Bagnera, "La ceramica invetriata di età islamica," in Alessandra Bagnera, ed., *Archeologia dell'Islam in Sicilia*, catalogue of the exhibition (Gibellina, 2012), pp. 24–35 and web-publication ([www.islaminsicilia.it](http://www.islaminsicilia.it)) (March 2012).

All the same, on the basis of a close comparison between historical sources and the archaeological data published so far,<sup>7</sup> and relying also on advances in knowledge relating to the medieval Maghreb, it is possible to formulate some new hypotheses and interpretations of the indices at our disposal. I propose to concentrate here on reviewing the salient points raised by recent research and speculation, all of which has served to promote a more coherent picture of the urban development of Palermo during the period of around two centuries in which it was the capital of Islamic Sicily.<sup>8</sup>

#### PALERMO IN THE AGHLABID PERIOD

Once they had chosen Palermo as the headquarters of the island's new civil and military government, the Aghlabids established themselves within the ancient fortified nucleus (Punic and then Romano-Byzantine) which the Arabic sources identify as Balarm and then as Qaṣr al-qadīm (hence the late medieval name of Cassaro; see Fig. 3.1).<sup>9</sup> As occurred in the case of other cities of ancient foundation conquered by Islam, the Byzantine Panormos had to undergo adaptations and modifications so as to respond to new needs linked to religious ritual (mosques but also baths and cemeterial areas), to political and administrative requirements (government headquarters, mint, offices, barracks) and to those relating to social life (houses, inns, warehouses, workshops, markets etc.). Whilst our present state of knowledge does not allow us to advance a serious assessment either of the modes or phases or of the overall impact of the first structural interventions undertaken in Byzantine Panormus, some information inferred from coins or from textual sources indicates that around fifty years after the Islamic conquest the city had fully embraced its role as capital.

Aside from the fact that the Aghlabids struck coins from a very early date in Sicily, the first mention of the mint as Madīnat Balarm, on a

<sup>7</sup> By which I mean up until May 2012.

<sup>8</sup> For the various themes relating to the development of Islamic Palermo and for a fuller bibliography see Alessandra Bagnera and Annliese Nef, "Histoire et Archéologie du domaine fatimide", in particular paragraphs II and III; Alessandra Bagnera, "Palermo in età islamica: evoluzione di una capitale emirale tra IX e metà XI secolo," in Lucia Arcifa and Maria Rita Sgarlata, eds, *From Polis to Madina. La trasformazione delle città siciliane tra tardo antico e alto medioevo (Siracusa, 21–23 giugno 2012)*, in press.

<sup>9</sup> For the other names used to refer to the city in the Arabic sources, see the chapter in the present volume by Annliese Nef on Islamic Palermo.

semi-*dirham* dated 230H/844–45,<sup>10</sup> enables us to establish that at this date Palermo had undergone a change in status.<sup>11</sup>

A few years later, passages in a letter from the monk Theodosius, who arrived in Palermo with other prisoners after the capture of Syracuse in 878, describe a city that, being a theatre for demonstrations of a manifestly ceremonial nature,<sup>12</sup> must also have been organised in an urbanistic and architectonic sense. The emir gave audiences in a structured space which we must suppose was befitting a power whose procedures were those of an “Eastern” sovereign.<sup>13</sup> The transfer of prisoners, involving a kind of public and solemn procession, was perhaps enacted along the central axis of the city, referred to as *simāt* in the later Arabic sources (see Fig. 3.1, blue line and 3.2, n° 8). Described as a paved street with flagstones, flanked by shops, and traversing the city from east to west, the *simāt* probably passed near the great mosque.<sup>14</sup> A layout of this sort is reminiscent of Kairouan,<sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Paul Balog, “La monetazione nella Sicilia araba e le sue imitazioni nell’Italia meridionale,” in Gabrieli-Scerrato, pp. 611–28, in particular p. 612 and fig. 1–2. On coinage, see Maria Amalia De Luca, “La monetazione araba,” in Rosario La Duca, ed., *Storia di Palermo. II. Dal tardo antico all’Islām* (Palermo, 2000), pp. 180–203; Ead. “La monetazione della Sicilia islamica,” in Alessandra Bagnera, ed., *Archeologia dell’Islam in Sicilia*, pp. 8–15; Ead. “Sicilia aghlabita: nuove testimonianze numismatiche,” in Bruno Callegger and Arianna D’Ottone, eds., *The 3rd Simone Assemani Symposium on Islamic Coinage (Rome, 2011)*, in press.

<sup>11</sup> For the questions linked to the mint in Palermo see in the present volume Annliese Nef, “Islamic Palermo and the *dār al-islām*,” p. 2, note 8 and pp. 15–16.

<sup>12</sup> Cristina Rognoni, “Au pied de la lettre? Réflexions à propos du témoignage de Théodose, moine et *grammatikos*, sur la prise de Syracuse en 878,” in Annliese Nef and Vivien Prigent, eds., *La Sicile de Byzance à l’Islam* (Paris, 2010), pp. 205–224, in particular pp. 221–22.

<sup>13</sup> A passage in Theodosius’s letter refers in particular to the ceremonial audience granted to the bishop of Syracuse by the Aghlabid emir. The latter was seated on a throne and screened by a veil, following a custom of eastern origin which, in the Islamic world, was formalised by the first Abbasid caliphs, see Joseph Chelhold, “Hidjāb,” in *Encyclopédie de l’Islam*, 2nd edn. (Leyden and Paris, 1960–2005).

<sup>14</sup> Ibn Ḥawqal, it., p. 120: “The [ancient] city extends lengthways and is furnished with a market that crosses it from east to west: the Great Street (*simāt*), which is paved in stone and has numerous buildings devoted to trade along its whole length.” In the *Kitāb Gharā’ib al-funūn* the term *simāt* ultimately refers to the market itself: *Kitāb Gharā’ib*, it., p. 435 and Arabic text at p. 430. For some elements pertaining to the relationship in Palermo between the *simāt* and the congregational mosque, see Adalgisa De Simone, “Il periodo arabo. Palermo araba,” in *Storia di Palermo. II*, pp. 78–113, pp. 100–101. See also *infra*, note 60.

<sup>15</sup> See Mondher Sakly “Kairouan,” in Jean-Claude Garcin, ed., *Grandes villes méditerranéennes du monde musulman médiéval* (Rome, 2000), pp. 57–85, especially pp. 71–72; see in addition Faouzi Mahfoudh, *Architecture et urbanisme en Ifrīqiya médiévale. Proposition pour une nouvelle approche* (Tunis, 2003), p. 50. Al-Bakrī attributes this organisation of Kairouan to the Omayyad caliph Hishām Ibn ‘Abd al-Mālīk (724–743): see Marcel Solignac, *Recherches sur les installations hydrauliques de Kairouan et des steppes tunisienne du VII<sup>e</sup> au XI<sup>e</sup> siècle (ap. J.-C.)* (Algiers, 1953), pp. 23–24.

the capital of the Aghlabids in Ifrīqiya, where the principal street crossing the inhabited zone and skirting the western side of the great mosque was likewise called *simāt*.<sup>16</sup>

In Theodosius's letter, Palermo appears likewise to have been a multi-ethnic city, which welcomed peoples coming from the Islamic world or otherwise, and which, being densely populated, had begun to extend beyond the ancient walled centre. Confirmation of this latter point is supplied by Ibn al-Athīr (1160–1233) who refers to the capture and sack of the “suburbs of the city” in the year 900 by Abū 'l-'Abbās, son of the Aghlabid emir Ibrāhīm II.<sup>17</sup>

If such information would lead one to assume that Palermo, at any rate in the last quarter of the 9th century, had already seen adjustments and alterations reflecting its new role as capital of the Sicilian emirate, the assumption is not borne out by the archaeological data. Aside from the maintenance of the walls and of part of the network of streets of the ancient city<sup>18</sup>—elements anyway preserved up until the present day—we simply lack the evidence to identify specific building projects within the earliest phase of Palermo's Islamic history. The characteristics and even the location of the government palace are still wholly unknown, and given the difficulties of elaborating a general model of urban development for the Islamic world,<sup>19</sup> all speculative reconstructions would seem to be inappropriate.<sup>20</sup> As for the other fundamental pole of the Islamic city, the congregational mosque (*jāmi'*), Ibn Ḥawqal recounts that it arose through the transformation of an earlier Christian church.<sup>21</sup> Given the fact that written sources and archaeological evidence alike place the ancient palaeochristian cathedral on the site occupied by the present cathedral (see Fig. 3.1, n° 6 and 3.2, n° 9), which is a Norman foundation, the same location has been posited for the congregational mosque. In addition,

<sup>16</sup> This point is also emphasised in De Simone, “Palermo araba . . .”, p. 101.

<sup>17</sup> Ibn al-Athīr, *BAS* it., 1: 402.

<sup>18</sup> See Elena Pezzini, “Madinat al-Ṣiqilliyya. Palermo in the Islamic Period,” in Giovanni Curatola and Attilio Petruccioli, eds., *Islamic Sicily: Art, Architecture and Landscape*, in press.

<sup>19</sup> Jean-Claude Garcin, “Le Caire et l'évolution urbaine des pays musulmans,” *Annales Islamologiques* 25 (1991), 289–304, in particular pp. 291–96; Pierre Guichard, “Les villes d'al-Andalus et de l'Occident musulman aux premiers siècles de leur histoire. Une hypothèse récente,” in Patrice Cressier and Mercedes Garcia-Arenal, eds., *Genèse de la ville islamique en al-Andalus et au Maghreb occidental* (Madrid, 1998), pp. 37–53.

<sup>20</sup> See also, in relation to this argument, De Simone, “Palermo araba,” pp. 85–88.

<sup>21</sup> Ibn Ḥawqal, it., p. 116.

when Ibn Ḥawqal stresses the latter's noteworthy dimensions,<sup>22</sup> he is evidently providing a snapshot of the situation in 973. The information given by the same author regarding the demic density of Palermo at this date lends weight to the hypothesis that one or more enlargements of the *jāmi'* mosque—certainly an early element to be ascribed to the Aghlabid reorganisation of the city—may have occurred over the course of time.

Two stretches of brick pavement pertaining to a “structure of vast dimensions” and dated prior to the mid-10th century have come to light beneath the Norman cathedral.<sup>23</sup> Already ascribed to the Byzantine church of St. Mary that is said to have been transformed into the *jāmi'* mosque,<sup>24</sup> from the published findings of the excavation a dating to the mid-10th century onwards of this paving may however be deduced.<sup>25</sup> A further element converging with this chronology is provided by what the evidence for the building techniques used here indicates, relating to the use of charcoal in the binding mortar. To judge by the researches conducted by Marcel Solignac in the region of Kairouan, this element constitutes a “customary index of binders subsequent to those employed by the Aghlabids,” or, in other words, a technique introduced into Tunisia in the Fatimid period.<sup>26</sup> Whereas Alexandre Lézine suggests that its use was restricted to the caliphate of the Fatimid al-Mu'izz (953–973),<sup>27</sup> binders of this type, endowed with hydraulic properties,<sup>28</sup> are nonetheless amply attested at Ṣabra al-Manṣūriyya between the end of the 10th and the first half of

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>23</sup> The two fragments of pavement, wholly similar one to the other and located at the same depth, were discovered in the *diaconicon* of the cathedral (see Fig. 3.1, n° 6) and along the northern wall of this latter, in the present-day Via dell'Incoronazione (see Fig. 3.1, n° 5); see Irina Garofano, “Nuove scoperte archeologiche nel cantiere di restauro della Cattedrale di Palermo,” *Kokalos* 43–44/II, 1997–1998, pp. 587–90, in particular, pp. 587–88 and note 3.

<sup>24</sup> Franco D'Angelo, “La città di Palermo tra la fine dell'età araba e la fine dell'età normanna,” in Franco D'Angelo and Vladimir Zorič, *La città di Palermo nel Medioevo* (Palermo, 2002), pp. 7–33, in particular, pp. 17–20.

<sup>25</sup> The two fragments of pavement turn out to have been built directly above strata of earth which have yielded pottery dating to between the 8th–9th centuries and the first half of the 10th century (see Irina Garofano, “Nuove scoperte archeologiche,” pp. 587–88 and note 3); so, this latter date should rather indicate a *terminus post quem* for the chronology of the pavement under discussion.

<sup>26</sup> Solignac, *Recherches sur les installations hydrauliques*, p. 258 and note 49; *Id.*, “Remarques de méthode sur l'étude des installations hydrauliques ifriqiyennes au Haut Moyen-Âge,” *Cahiers de Tunisie* 47–48/12 (1964), 25–36, in particular pp. 31–33.

<sup>27</sup> Alexandre Lézine, *Deux villes d'Ifrīqiya. Études d'archéologie, d'urbanisme, de démographie*. Sousse, Tunis (Paris, 1971), p. 81.

<sup>28</sup> Solignac, “Remarques de méthode,” p. 32.

the 11th century, not only in the cisterns and basins, but also in the pavements with terracotta tiles.<sup>29</sup> To judge by both the stratigraphical and the technical data, the Palermitan finds thus seems to indicate an intervention dating from the mid-10th century onwards, therefore not attributable to the Aghlabid period. At the same time, the hydraulic properties of the mortar suggest a relationship between the pavement and an external space, perhaps the courtyard of the *jāmi'* mosque.

As for the existence of suburbs *extra-moenia*, such as both Theodosius in his letter and Ibn al-Athīr imply, in this case too archaeological evidence confirming it is very scarce and difficult to date. Aside from some structures having come to light at Palazzo Bonagia (see Fig. 3.1, n° 16), dated not unambiguously to the 9th–10th century,<sup>30</sup> and some fragmentary evidence for an early phase of occupation recovered at the former monastery of the Magione<sup>31</sup> (see Fig. 3.1, n° 15), the only noteworthy exception to have emerged up until the present time is represented by the sequences brought to light by the excavations carried out in the Castello-S. Pietro quarter<sup>32</sup> (see Fig. 3.1, n° 11). Here a cemetery of Islamic observance set up directly on the rocky substrate and in use in the course of the 9th century, precedes a phase of habitation ostensibly related to the progressive urban expansion which affected the area outside the Cassaro in the course of the

<sup>29</sup> For the most recent archaeological investigations at Šabra al-Manšūriyya, one should consult the various contributions in Patrice Cressier and Mourad Rammah, eds., *Šabra al-Manšūriyya*.

<sup>30</sup> The structures discovered have been dated to the 9th–10th century in Philippe Tisseyre, "Palermo. Saggi archeologici a Palazzo Bonagia," in AA.VV., *Archeologia e territorio* (Palermo, 1997), pp. 485–86, but their chronology is deemed to be indeterminable in Carmela Angela Di Stefano, "Attività della Soprintendenza per i Beni culturali e ambientali di Palermo," *Kokalos* 43–44 (1997–98), 2, 575–77.

<sup>31</sup> This is what one might infer from the presence, in the deeper strata of the infill in a well associated with the Islamic inhabited area, of some pottery fragments imported from North Africa and datable to the end of the 9th–10th century, see Bagnera, Nef, "Histoire et archéologie," at paragraph IV; Bagnera, "La ceramica invetriata di età islamica", p. 27, fig. 6. For the evidence relating to the excavation, the reader should refer to Franco D'Angelo and Irina Garofano, "Scavi al convento della SS. Trinità (Magione) di Palermo," in Carmela Angela Di Stefano, Antonio Cadei, Maria Andaloro, eds., *Federico e la Sicilia, dalla terra alla corona. I. Archeologia e architettura (catalogo della mostra, Palermo, 1995)* (Palermo, 1995), pp. 335–41, in particular pp. 339–40, cat. P45bis, fig. p. 341; Eid., "Lo scavo e i reperti", in Carmela Angela Di Stefano, Francesco Tomaselli, Franco D'Angelo, Irina Garofano, "Palermo. Ricerche archeologiche nel Convento della SS. Trinità (Magione)," *Archeologia Medievale* 24 (1997), 283–310, in particular, pp. 304–307, cat. n° 18, fig. 16.18.

<sup>32</sup> We refer here to the findings of the Saggio B (see here Fig. 3.1, n° 11): Lucia Arcifa *et alii*, "Lo scavo archeologico di Castello S. Pietro a Palermo," *B.C.A.*, 6–8/2 (1985–87), 30–41, and in particular, pp. 35–37, fig. 4, 8; Eid., "Palerme, quartier Castello San Pietro," *MEFRM* 101/1 (1989), 332–50, above all p. 347.

10th century.<sup>33</sup> Although there are no certainties as to the actual width of this cemetery—the only solid archaeological evidence so far which may indubitably be traced back to the Aghlabid city—we cannot rule out the possibility that it was subsequently extended towards the coast. In the adjacent area of Castello a Mare (see Fig. 3.1, n° 12), a series of stratified graves, partly carved out of the rock, has been discovered more recently and dated to the 10th–11th century;<sup>34</sup> these could indicate a phase of use of the same cemetery continuing until the late Islamic period (see below). The fact that the original use of both these areas turns out to have been funerary suggests that, during the 9th century at any rate, this zone of the city did not lie within the inhabited settlement *extra-moenia* to which the sources cited above refer.

Considered in its entirety, the archaeological evidence pertaining to Palermo in the Aghlabid period appears in fact to be too weak not only with respect to what the historical data implies, but also in relation to the existence of a somewhat extensive cemetery area which, being in use in the 9th century, is currently without a real urban context to which we might refer. The existing state of knowledge does not allow us to assess either the timescale or the procedures by which the Aghlabids settled in

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<sup>33</sup> The abovementioned chronologies have been established on the basis of the pottery contained in the infill deposit from a well associated with the Muslim inhabited area, which has restored the *terminus ante quem* for dating the phase when the cemetery was in use. The arguments connected with these contexts have been recently updated: see Lucia Arcifa and Alessandra Bagnera, "Castello-San Pietro (Palermo): una riconsiderazione dei primi contesti islamici", in Annliese Nef, Fabiola Ardizzone et alii, ed., *Le processus d'islamisation de la Sicile et de la Méditerranée centrale*, in press. The chronology for the finds belonging to the so-called "Early Phase" has also been discussed by the present author in Arcifa, Bagnera, Nef, "Archeologia della Sicilia islamica," in particular p. 255, and in Bagnera, Nef, "Histoire et archéologie", paragraph IV. For the pottery from the overall context of Castello S. Pietro see Lucia Arcifa, "Dal X al XII secolo," in Ead. and Elisabeth Lesnes, "Primi dati sulle produzioni ceramiche palermitane dal X al XV secolo," in *Actes du VIe Congrès de l'AECEM2 (Aix-en-Provence, 13–18 novembre 1995)* (Aix-en-Provence, 1997), pp. 405–411; Ead., "Contributo allo studio della ceramica comune medievale in Sicilia (sec. X–XII): problemi di classificazione e temi di ricerca," in *Le village médiéval et son environnement. Etudes offertes à Jean-Marie Pesez* (Paris, 1998), pp. 273–89. For a synthesis devoted solely to the pottery of the Islamic period, see Lucia Arcifa, "Palermo, Castello S. Pietro: i contesti ceramici di età islamica", in Alessandra Bagnera, ed., *Archeologia dell'Islam in Sicilia*, pp. 20–23.

<sup>34</sup> On the first discoveries see Rodo Santoro, *La fortezza di Castellammare in Palermo. Primi Scavi e restauri (1988–1994)* (Palermo, 1996), p. 45, fig. 46; Philippe Tisseyre, "Palermo, saggi archeologici alla torre maestra del Castello a Mare," in Caterina Greco, Francesca Spatafora and Stefano Vassallo, eds., *Archeologia e territorio*, (Palermo, 1997) p. 486; Carmela Angela Di Stefano, "Attività della Soprintendenza per i Beni culturali," pp. 575–576. On the excavations recently executed, see Francesca Spatafora, *Da Panormos a Balarm. Nuove ricerche di archeologia urbana* (Palermo, 2005), pp. 73–75.

the pre-existing and already defined city which they chose as their capital, or to grasp the real scale of an *extra-moenia* occupation that was probably sporadic in nature. It would seem nonetheless plausible to assert that the urban framework of early Islamic Palermo, affected certainly by modifications during this same Aghlabid period, was circumscribed by the ancient fortified nucleus. A new layout, attributable to the direct intervention of the Fatimids, would instead shift the city in a new direction, at the turn of the first third of the 10th century.

### THE NEW PALERMO OF THE FATIMIDS

A crucial turning-point in the history of the urban development of Palermo in the Islamic period is certainly represented by the foundation, in 937–938, of the Khālīṣa, the fortified citadel and seat of government and administration built by Khalīl b. Iṣḥāq b. al-Ward, the general sent from Mahdiyya by the Fatimid caliph al-Qā'im to quell a revolt. Located outside the most ancient urban nucleus (*Balarm*) and in close proximity to the sea, the scholarly consensus is that it stood in the area around Piazza Marina (see Fig. 3.1, green point and 3.2). This latter was once a harbour basin and perhaps part of the arsenal that Ibn Ḥawqal places within the Khālīṣa,<sup>35</sup> but which the map from the *Kitāb Gharā'ib al-funūn* places on the outside.<sup>36</sup>

Aside from the many questions pertaining to its actual extent and morphology,<sup>37</sup> the fact remains that the foundation of the Khālīṣa recast

<sup>35</sup> "In front of the capital [*madīnat Balarm*] there is another city, called al-Khālīṣa: it too has a stone wall which may not however be compared with that of Palermo. The sovereign and his retinue live there: it contains two public baths, but there are neither markets there nor warehouses. There is a little cathedral (*jāmi'*) mosque, the sovereign's military garrison, an arsenal, and the administrative offices. The city has four gates, to the north, south and west; but to the east is the sea and a wall without a gate." Ibn Ḥawqal, *it.*, pp. 116–118. Al-Muqaddasī, who identifies Khālīṣa as "the external city," and who is the only witness to situate markets inside it, mentions, though without locating them, the four gates mentioned above: Bāb Kutāma, Bāb al-Futūḥ, Bāb al-Bunūd, Bāb al-Ṣina'a: *BAS it.*, 2: 671.

<sup>36</sup> The arsenal (*al-ṣina'a*) appears there, separated from the Khālīṣa and located in the eastern part of the port, at the two extremities of which are situated two watch towers called "of the Chain;" cf. *Kitāb Gharā'ib*, *it.*, fig. 3 and 6, toponyms n. 101–103, p. 444.

<sup>37</sup> For a deeper scrutiny of this same question I would refer the reader to Elena Pezzini, "Un tratto della cinta muraria della città di Palermo," *MEFRM* 110/2 (1998), 719–771, in particular pp. 762–769; Ead., "La formazione del quartiere della Kalsa. Dati e problemi," in Elvira D'Amico, ed., *Percorsi didattici a Palazzo Abatellis*, (Palermo, 2004), pp. 33–53. More recently the same scholar has hypothesised that, apart from extending into the zone situated between the present-day church of S. Maria della Catena (see Fig. 3.1, n° 23) and Via



Palermo as a “city with two cities.” Autonomous, well-defended and clearly marked off from the rest of the urban aggregate, the Khālīṣa—“the [place] reserved for power”<sup>38</sup>—appeared to be physically quite distinct, and to have a specific role wholly separate from the rest of the city, which for its part also comprised the ancient fortified nucleus of Madīnat Balarm.

This recasting of the city reflected a deliberate policy serving to effect a separation between the Shi‘ite elite and an urban population that was predominantly Sunni, a policy promoted by the Fatimids by means of an urban model in evidence in all of their capitals: Mahdiyya (921) and Ṣabra al-Manṣūriyya (945) in Tunisia, and Cairo (969) in Egypt. Indeed, such a model reflected a social and political process which, if we set aside the religious dimension, affected capitals throughout the Islamic world in the 9th–10th century,<sup>39</sup> albeit to differing extents and in varying guises.

At the time of the foundation of the Khālīṣa, the headquarters of the Fatimids was in Mahdiyya, their first capital, which was built on a peninsula on the eastern coast of Tunisia, between 915 and 920–21, the year in which the first Fatimid caliph transferred his seat of government there. Mahdiyya did however witness noteworthy building projects at least up until the advent, in 934, of the third caliph, al-Qā‘im,<sup>40</sup> the same ruler who issued the order to found the new government residence in Palermo. It is therefore safe to assume that, where the restructuring of the Sicilian capital was concerned, Mahdiyya represented a reference point, indeed, the only possible one in the context of contemporary Fatimid realities. Hence the numerous similarities, to judge in particular from the evidence we may infer from the sources, between the two cities, and at various different levels.

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Alloro (see Fig. 3.1, green line), the Khālīṣa could also include the zone within which the Monastery of S. Francesco currently stands (see Fig. 3.1, n° 14): Elena Pezzini, “Madīnat al-Ṣiqillīyya.”

<sup>38</sup> De Simone, “Palermo araba,” p. 97 proposes this translation in place of the more common rendering of “elect” or “pure,” inasmuch as it was a city of the Shi‘ites; cfr. Henri Bresc, “Les autonomismes urbains des cités islamiques,” in *Les origines des libertés urbaines (Actes du XVI<sup>e</sup> Congrès de la SHMESP, Rouen, 1985)* (Rouen, 1990), pp. 97–119, in particular p. 98.

<sup>39</sup> See Thierry Bianquis, “Groupes de solidarité et attitudes face au pouvoir dans le monde arabe médiéval,” in *Compte-rendu de la réunion des chercheurs sur le monde arabe et musulman* (Aix-en-Provence, 1986), p. 45; Guichard, “Les villes d’al-Andalus et de l’Occident musulman,” pp. 42–43 and 49.

<sup>40</sup> Recent archaeological finds would seem to confirm once and for all the attribution of the ruins of the only Fatimid palace that has come to light in Mahdiyya to al-Qā‘im: see Adnan Louhichi, “La mosaïque de Mahdia, contexte et interprétation,” *Africa* 20 (2004), 143–166, in particular p. 143, 150 and 153.

Convincing parallels between the two palatine complexes of the Khālīṣa and of al-Mahdiyya have already been brought to light emphasizing their functional and morphological similarities, since both served as Fatimid seats of government, were situated on the coast and near to a port, exercised strict control over the arsenal located within their bounds, were enclosed by stone walls that must in part have followed the coastline, and organised their internal space by means of right-angled axes.<sup>41</sup> One could further add that like al-Mahdiyya—limited in the 10th century, according to Alexandre Lézine, to the western part of the peninsula, where the main monumental complexes were concentrated, and characterised by an eminently private dimension<sup>42</sup>—the Khālīṣa too appears from the sources to have had a prominent role as the sovereign's residence.<sup>43</sup> The multi-functionality characteristic of Islamic palatine contexts likewise justifies the presence in the Khālīṣa of two *ḥammām*, of the *dīwān* (administrative office) and of a *jāmi'* mosque. Described by Ibn Ḥawqal as "small", this latter was without a doubt reserved for the use of the prince and the Shi'ite ruling elite, suggesting the implementation of a religious bipolarity of the kind referred to above.

Other resemblances between the Khālīṣa and al-Mahdiyya seem to emerge once we analyse the two "cities of power" in relation to the general organisation of urban space, for then the comparison is shifted on to a broader register, which enables us to assess how in all probability the entire recasting of Palermo in the Fatimid period as a "city with two cities" relates to the caliphal capital. We know from the sources that the organisation of Mahdiyya provided for the combination of a closed, and therefore reserved entity having a palatine function (al-Mahdiyya in the strict sense) with an urban aggregate including a main quarter, residential and commercial in nature, Madīnat al-Zawīla, and a suburb with a partly

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<sup>41</sup> All these items are cogently discussed in Pezzini, "Un tratto della cinta muraria;" Ead. "La formazione del quartiere della Kalsa." In the present text, "al-Mahdiyya" will be used to indicate the fortified part of the peninsula where the Palatine nucleus established by the Fatimids is to be found, whereas "Mahdiyya" will designate the city as a whole.

<sup>42</sup> Alexandre Lézine, *Mahdiyya. Recherches d'archéologie islamique* (Paris, 1965), p. 45, fig. 1 p. 17, fig. 4 p. 22; Id., "Mahdiyya. Quelques précisions sur la 'ville' des premiers Fatimides," in *Id.*, *Notes d'archéologie ifriqiyenne* (Paris, 1968), pp. 81–101, in particular pp. 94–96 and note 4, p. 94.

<sup>43</sup> A role that the map from the *Kitāb Gharā'ib al-funūn* represents schematically by depicting an edifice with a dome identified as *Qaṣr al-ṣultān wa-sakanu-hu wa-'abidu-hu* ("the sovereign's palace, his residence and his slaves"): see *Kitāb Gharā'ib*, it. fig. 6 and toponyms n. 104 and 105; for the interpretation of this drawing as a representation of the Khālīṣa see *Ibid.*, p. 421.

military function, the Rabaḍ al-Ḥimā. Madīnat al-Zawīla, which predated the foundation of Fatimid al-Mahdiyya and was situated in close proximity to the latter, constituted the economic engine of the city, as well as the residential area of the principal merchants in the city;<sup>44</sup> only in the Zirid period was it endowed with a stone surrounding wall.<sup>45</sup> The Rabaḍ al-Ḥimā, on the other hand, was a residential quarter for the army, with cultivated areas and orchards.<sup>46</sup>

A similar relationship between city of power and aggregate *extra-muros* must have pertained where the Khālīṣa and the rest of the city of Palermo were concerned, even if in this latter case the society and the urban activities were divided between the suburbs and the ancient fortified nucleus. The coexistence in 10th-century Palermo, by contrast with Fatimid Mahdiyya, of two fortified entities, does not constitute an essential difference if one takes into account the fact that, after the Fatimid foundation of the Khālīṣa, the ancient, elongated city of Madīnat Balarm was deprived of the administrative and political role that had characterised it under the Aghlabids. In the context of the city as a whole its essential functions appear very similar to those of the other quarters (*ḥārāt*) which, not being furnished with walls, at any rate until the end of the 10th century, included markets, houses, *ḥammām*-s, inns and mosques. By contrast with the other quarters, Madīnat Balarm did however retain an importance relating to its being at once at the heart of the religious, social and economic life of a city with a Sunni majority and the residential quarter of the elite, while its formidable walls constituted a morphological feature which dominated the whole of the urban landscape and never failed to catch the attention of the Arab geographers. Both of these features, which made of it the principal element from the urban assemblage

<sup>44</sup> Al-Bakrī, "Description de l'Afrique septentrionale," trans. William Mac Guckin de Slane (Paris, 1965), pp. 172–173. The physical proximity of, and the interdependence at various levels between al-Mahdiyya and Madīnat al-Zawīla is evident in various accounts recovered from the historical sources, some of which are reproduced in *BAS* it., 1: 440–41, 482–84 and 487 (Ibn al-Athīr); 2: 33, 40 (Ibn 'Idhārī); 2: 62, 69, 75, 77, 79 (al-Tījānī); 2: 153 (al-Nuwayrī); 2: 230–32 (Ibn Khaldūn). The toponym "Madīnat Zawīla" features, distinct from but close to that of Mahdiyya, on one of the maps in Book II of the *Kitāb Gharā'ib al-Funūn*, at f. 23b–24a: see <http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/bookofcuriosities/>, "Rectangular world map," 197 and "Glossary" s.v. "Madīnat Zawīlah;" the map of Mahdiyya (f. 34a) is also published in *Kitāb Gharā'ib*, it. at fig. 4. On Madīnat Zawīla, see also Roger Hady Idris, *La Berbérie orientale sous les Zirides, X<sup>e</sup>–XII<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris, 1962), 2, p. 451.

<sup>45</sup> See Lucien Golvin, "Mahdiyya à la période fatimide," *Revue de l'Occident musulman et de la Méditerranée* 27 (1979), 75–98, in particular p. 94.

<sup>46</sup> Al-Bakrī, *Description de l'Afrique septentrionale*, pp. 66 e 68. See also Jean Despois, *La Tunisie Orientale. Sahel et Basse Steppe, étude géographique* (Paris, 1955), p. 142.

situated outside the Khālīṣa, probably account for its being called *madīna*, a word which, given its primary meaning of “fortified entity with a limited area of settlement and a restricted number of specific functions,”<sup>47</sup> did not have the sense in the medieval Islamic world that our current term “city” now has.<sup>48</sup>

This new definition of the city of Palermo may have been informed from the outset by the presence of an area set aside for a military function, the Mu‘askar (“military encampment”<sup>49</sup> or “place in which the army was lodged”)<sup>50</sup> mentioned by Ibn Ḥawqal in relation to the presence in the suburban areas of numerous small mosques and springs of water.<sup>51</sup> A series of convergent clues allow us to situate the Mu‘askar in the external zone located to the west of the ancient city, where it occupied a vast area characterised by a relative abundance of water and the presence of cultivated fields and gardens.<sup>52</sup> The fact that Ibn Ḥawqal mentions, amongst the springs inside the Mu‘askar, the one called ‘Ayn Abī Sa‘īd and generally reckoned to be in the present-day quarter of Denisinni (see Fig. 3.2, n° 4),<sup>53</sup> lends weight to the hypothesis that the Mu‘askar also included this zone, which, being situated just outside the present-day Porta Nuova (see Fig. 3.1, n° 2 and 3.2, n° 5),<sup>54</sup> still featured as a well-irrigated and cultivated quarter

<sup>47</sup> It is used to mean this in the *Lisān al-‘Arab*: Cf. Oleg Grabar *et alii*, *City in the Desert. Qaṣr al-Hayr East* (Harvard, 1978), p. 80–81, and Keppel Archibald Cameron Creswell, *A short Account of Early Muslim Architecture. Revised and supplemented by James Allan* (Aldershot, 1989), pp. 158–159.

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, Garcin, “Le Caire et l’évolution urbaine,” p. 295. The reader should also refer to the synthesis by Patrice Cressier and Mercedes García-Arenal in their presentation in *Eid.*, ed., *Genèse de la ville islamique*, pp. 12–13 and to Christine Mazzoli-Guintard, “L’urbanisation d’al-Andalus au IX<sup>e</sup> siècle: données chronologiques”, *ibid.*, pp. 99–106, in particular pp. 99–100.

<sup>49</sup> De Simone, “Palermo nei geografi,” p. 150.

<sup>50</sup> *Ead.*, “Palermo araba,” p. 99.

<sup>51</sup> Ibn Ḥawqal, *it.*, p. 119. See also De Simone, “Palermo nei geografi,” pp. 150, 165–68; *Ead.*, “Palermo araba,” p. 99.

<sup>52</sup> For this hypothetical location see Bagnera, Nef, “Histoire et archéologie.”

<sup>53</sup> A reading of the toponym “Denisinni” as a popular corruption of the Arabic ‘Ayn Abī Sa‘īd was proposed in Michele Amari, *Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia*, revised by Carlo Alfonso Nallino (Catania, 1933–1939; anastatic reprint, Catania, 1991), 2, p. 51, n. 1. Cf. also Adalgisa De Simone, “L’idronimia araba medioevale nel palermitano: dalla metafora poetica al fraintendimento etimologico,” in Anna Maria Di Tolla, Vincenzo Strika, eds., *Acqua: la civiltà arabo-islamica, il contesto giuridico-politico, gli aspetti tecnici, gestionali e finanziari della cooperazione italo-araba* (Naples, 2005), pp. 193–206, in particular p. 203.

<sup>54</sup> The hypothesis that the Mu‘askar might correspond to the present-day quarter of Denisinni dates back to Vincenzo Di Giovanni, *La topografia antica di Palermo dal sec. X al XV* (Palermo, 1889–1890), I, p. 429.

in the documents of the 14th and 15th centuries.<sup>55</sup> The defining characteristics of this military quarter also reinforces the analogy between the urban organisation of Palermo and that of the first Ifriqiyan capital of the Fatimids, where, as we have seen, a similarly conceived quarter, the Rabaḍ al-Ḥimā<sup>56</sup> formed with Madīnat al-Zawīla the aggregate *extra-moenia* of al-Mahdiyya, the palatine city strictly understood.

The foundation of the Khālīṣa by the Fatimids (937–938) and the consequent recasting of Palermo therefore constituted, prior to the advent of the Kalbids (c. 948–1040), a decisive intervention on the part of the central power, and one intended to effect a reorganisation of the urban space. Nor does it seem illogical to attribute to it the decisive start of an ambitious building programme in those suburban areas which the letter written by the monk Theodosius (878) suggests were already settled in part in the last third of the 9th century, as Ibn al-Athīr also relates (see above), and which, in the detailed description of Palermo made by Ibn Ḥawqal in 973, are shown by that date to be occupied by extensive quarters *extra-moenia* in an advanced stage of development<sup>57</sup> (see Fig. 3.2). In the interval of around 100 years that separates these testimonies, the foundation of the Khālīṣa indubitably represents a crucial urbanistic episode which, being rich in multiple consequences, certainly had an impact upon the organisation of the territory outside the two fortified nuclei.

#### THE DEVELOPMENT AND URBAN GROWTH OF PALERMO IN THE KALBID PERIOD (SECOND HALF OF THE 10TH–FIRST HALF OF THE 11TH CENTURY)

It is therefore probable that already in the first half of the 10th century there had begun to emerge the polynuclear city which, gradually modified by later interventions on the part of the Kalbid dynasty (closely associated with the Fatimids), we see described first by Ibn Ḥawqal in 973 and, just a few years later, in 985, by al-Muqaddasī.<sup>58</sup> What the former above all restores to us is the best known image from the history of

<sup>55</sup> Henri Bresc, "Les jardins de Palerme (1290–1460)," *MEFR. Moyen-Age, Temps modernes* 84/1 (1972), 55–127, in particular pp. 88, 95 e 107–108.

<sup>56</sup> Al-Bakrī, *Description de l'Afrique septentrionale*, pp. 66 e 68.

<sup>57</sup> Ibn Ḥawqal, *it.*, p. 118; De Simone, "Palermo nei geografi," pp. 146–49; Ead., "Palermo araba," above all pp. 90–100.

<sup>58</sup> See above, notes 1 and 2.

Palermo in the Islamic period,<sup>59</sup> namely, that of a now fully developed city that seems to consist of five main parts: the two fortified “poles” of the Madīnat Balarm and of the Khālīṣa and, distributed across the zones rich in water outside of them, the three *ḥārat*-s, large quarters without surrounding walls, furnished not only with dwellings but also with markets and workshops, mosques, baths, inns: the Ḥārāt al-Ṣaqālība (Quarter of the Slaves), the Ḥārāt Maṣjid Ibn Ṣaqlāb (Quarter of the mosque of Ibn Ṣaqlāb), the Ḥārāt al-jadīda (New quarter) (see Fig. 3.2). A leading feature of this urban landscape is, in addition, the presence of hydraulic structures (norias, mills) and of substantial, well irrigated areas cultivated as gardens and orchards.

In this mid-10th century city, the Madīnat Balarm, alongside the Fatimid citadel, remained a nucleus of particular importance. Within it the principal roadway and axis (*simāt*; Fig. 3.1 and 3.2, n° 8) increasingly took on the appearance of a major street for trade and an artery linking up with the Sunni congregational mosque (see Fig. 3.1, n° 5–6 and 3.2, n° 9) that, perhaps located at a certain distance from the main highway,<sup>60</sup> constituted the pole of economic activity in the city.<sup>61</sup> Ibn Ḥawqal also is at some pains to record the more recent interventions, due in particular to the second of the Kalbid emirs, Aḥmad b. al-Ḥasan (954–969), which essentially concerned the reorganisation of the circuit of walls through the new opening of three of the nine gates with which, according to the Arab geographer, Madīnat Balarm was endowed: one gate which he defines as “without a name,” the Bāb al-Shifā’ and the Bāb al-Riyāḍ. While many of the gates mentioned by Ibn Ḥawqal have been located on the basis of various elements,<sup>62</sup> some observations enable us to advance a number of fresh proposals regarding the fact that, in the context of the abovementioned

<sup>59</sup> This is one reason why in the present context we shall allude to it only in passing, referring the reader in search of more detail to the several times cited article by De Simone, “Palermo nei geografi” and Ead., “Palermo araba.”

<sup>60</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 101, where this hypothesis is advanced, and notice is taken of Ibn Ḥawqal’s failure to mention the main mosque in the context of the *simāt*. He nonetheless locates it “a bowshot away” from a friend’s shop along the “great street of Palermo” (Ibn Ḥawqal, *it.*, p. 125), a distance hard to estimate.

<sup>61</sup> Regarding the distribution of the Palermitan markets between the Madīnat Balarm and the other quarters see De Simone, “Palermo nei geografi,” pp. 173–75; Nef, “Islamic Palermo”, in the present volume.

<sup>62</sup> Ibn Ḥawqal, *it.*, p. 119. As to the location of the gates mentioned by the geographer, see De Simone, “Palermo nei geografi,” pp. 140–42; Ead., “Palermo araba,” pp. 91–94 and fig. 4; see also Pezzini in this volume and Fig. 7.1; Ead., “Madīnat al-Ṣiqilliyya.”

reorganisation of the routes in the Kalbid period, the *simāt* was endowed with two gates located at the two extremities.<sup>63</sup>

The main entrance into Madīnat Balarm on the eastern side was certainly guaranteed by the imposing Bāb al-Baḥr, by general consent identified with the Porta dei Patitelli known from later medieval sources and demolished in 1564<sup>64</sup> (see Fig. 3.1, n° 9; 3.2, n°10). According to a recent hypothesis, this monumental and complex gate<sup>65</sup> offered direct access to the *simāt*.<sup>66</sup> Not mentioned by Ibn Ḥawqal as one of the interventions due to Aḥmad b. al-Ḥasan, and therefore preceding them, in the Kalbid period this gate probably underwent a reconfiguration of a celebratory nature, as would be attested by the dating to the second half of the 10th century of an inscription in Cufic which crowned one of its towers.<sup>67</sup>

Where entrance to the city on the western side is concerned, a case may be made for locating the Bāb al-Riyād (Gate of the Gardens) on the access to the *simāt*. Since Ibn Ḥawqal tells us that this gate was a “recent construction” planned by the abovementioned Kalbid emir to replace the nearby and vulnerable Bāb Ibn Qurhub, safety considerations had a part to play in this decision, perhaps not unconnected to the order to reinforce the city defences contained in the famous rescript of al-Muʿizz from 966–67. The princely commission and the defensive nature of the project therefore give us leave to suppose an intervention on a certain scale, which would seem thus to be at odds with the fact that no constructive phase from the Islamic period is recorded in the published evidence drawn from the excavation which has brought to light, beneath the Palace of the Normans (see Fig. 3.1, n° 1),<sup>68</sup> an ancient gate which is

<sup>63</sup> This hypothesis, presented here in a cursory form, is discussed at greater length in Bagnera and Nef, “Histoire et archéologie.”

<sup>64</sup> The demolition of this gate was effected in order to extend the axis of Corso Vittorio Emanuele beyond the confines of the Cassaro, and up to Piazza Marina (see Fig. 3.1, blue line): see Aldo Casamento, *La rettifica della strada del Cassaro a Palermo* (Palermo, 2000), pp. 11–12.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Gaetano Bruccoli, “Considerazioni topografiche sopra la bab al-bahr,” in *Storia di Palermo. II*, DVD.

<sup>66</sup> Pezzini, “Madīnat al-Ṣiqilliyya.” See also, Ead., in this volume and Fig. 7.1.

<sup>67</sup> Known only from a 16th-century drawing, Amari, *Storia dei Musulmani*, II, p. 303 and note 1, interpreted its date as being 360 H./970 and noted the presence of two Koranic verses (in sequence: Koran, XXIV, 36–37 and II, 256).

<sup>68</sup> To be more precise, beneath the “Sale del Duca di Montalto” and in the context of structures identified as forming part of the urban fortifications dating from the 5th century BC, see Rosalia Camerata Scovazzo, “Delle antiche cinte murarie di Palermo e di altri rinvenimenti archeologici effettuati tra il 1984 e il 1986,” *Panormus II* (Palermo, 1990), pp. 95–104.

generally identified at present with the Bāb al-Riyāḍ.<sup>69</sup> Conversely, both the possible reference in this name to the gardens of the Mu'askar,<sup>70</sup> and the possible location of a part at any rate of this military quarter in the present-day zone of Denisinni (see Fig. 3.2, n° 4; see above) justify the hypothesis that the gate in question opened out into a stretch of wall closer to this latter zone. Furthermore, taking into consideration the fact that at the other end of the *simāṭ* there stood the monumental Bāb al-Baḥr (see Fig. 3.1, n° 9 and 3.2, n° 10), which, as has been pointed out, was probably rebuilt precisely in the Kalbid period, it seems difficult indeed to imagine that the only one of the three new gates with which Aḥmad b. al-Ḥasan furnished Madīnat Balarm to be situated along the western stretch of the wall (the Bāb al-Riyāḍ), could have opened out on to any other place but the access to the principal street axis.<sup>71</sup> One can further reflect upon the fact that, in a city having grown massively and expanded beyond the two fortified nuclei of the Khālīṣa and of Madīnat Balarm (see Fig. 3.2), this latter not only retained, as we have said, a role of primary importance, but also occupied a central position between the hinterland and the coast. A direct means of access to the principal urban artery, not least on the western side of the city walls beyond which we could plausibly locate a populous settlement,<sup>72</sup> might then express a specific logic of communication in relation not only to the *jāmi'* mosque but also to the zones closer to the sea, where some of the key areas of the city—namely, the Khālīṣa, the port, the cemetery areas (see *infra*)—were to be found.

The location of two gates at the end of the principal street axis corresponds to a schema attested at the same period both in Ifrīqiya and in Egypt. At Kairouan, in a layout of pre-Fatimid origin that remains however

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<sup>69</sup> This interpretation, proposed by D'Angelo, "La città di Palermo," pp. 11–14, is implicit in the location for the gate posited by De Simone, "Palermo araba," fig. 4. A dubitative interpretation as Bāb Ibn Qurhub is conversely proposed by Elena Pezzini in this volume, Fig. 7.1.

<sup>70</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>71</sup> In the absence of archaeological verification of the course of the street, one cannot wholly rule out the possibility that the route followed by the *simāṭ* may not have corresponded exactly to that of the present-day Corso Vittorio Emanuele (see Fig. 3.1, blue line), at whose western end the Porta Nuova (see Fig. 3.1, n° 2 and Fig. 3.3, n° 5) now stands; this latter dates instead to the 16th century when a new plan reforming the principal street axis of the city was implemented (see Casamento, *La rettifica della strada*, pp. 11–12 and 44).

<sup>72</sup> Ibn Ḥawqal locates the Mu'askar there, adverting also to a zone rich in little mosques (and therefore in inhabited settlements) and in freshwater springs, whereas the *Kitāb Ḥarā'ib al-funūn* represents it as a habitat with farmsteads and cultivated spaces.



at the basis also of the urban development of the 10th and 11th centuries,<sup>73</sup> the principal street axis—likewise called *simāf*, as we have said—skirted the western side of the great mosque.<sup>74</sup> The same was true of al-Qāhira (Cairo), the new capital founded in 969 in Egypt by the caliph al-Mu‘izz, during whose reign (953–973) the Kalbid emir of Sicily, Aḥmad b. al-Ḥasan (954–969) built in Palermo, along with the other gates, the Bāb al-Riyaḍ. In the new capital of the Fatimids, two gates (Bāb al-Futūḥ and Bāb al-Zuwayla) opened out on to the far end of the principal street axis, in relation to which the great mosque of al-Azhar (970–972) was instead set back a considerable distance.<sup>75</sup>

If the image of Palermo Ibn Ḥawqal has bequeathed to us has become emblematic of the city in the Islamic period, a subsequent phase of urban growth and some elements introduced after his visit in 973 are recorded in the *Kitāb Gharā’ib al-funūn*. The text and accompanying map bring to light not only an intensified building programme affecting the entire urban context—to the extent even of altering the author’s perception of the general morphology of the city—<sup>76</sup> but also a series of new interventions, which, being attributed in particular to the emir Ja‘far b. Yūsuf (998–1019), serve to define the image of Palermo in the later Kalbid period. The walls of the Qaṣr al-qadīm (as Madinat Balarm is referred to in this context) were again affected both by the reinforcement of the ancient defences and by the opening of three new gates.<sup>77</sup> In the meantime there is evidence for the building of new quarters whose demic densities varied, for the intensification of the inhabited zone in the areas under cultivation to the west of the Cassaro, apparently also affected by the presence of dwellings of an aristocratic type in and amongst gardens and hydraulic installations (see below), and, finally, for a parcellising of the urban space with walled enclosures ringing even the larger quarters. These last

<sup>73</sup> Patrice Cressier *et alii*, “Les grands traits de l’urbanisme,” in Patrice Cressier and Mourad Rammah, eds., *Šabra al-Manšūriyya*.

<sup>74</sup> See Alexandre Lézine, “Le plan ancien de la ville de Kairouan” in *Id.*, *Notes d’archéologie ifriqiyenne*, pp. 55–72, in particular p. 63; Sakly “Kairouan,” pp. 71–72.

<sup>75</sup> See Fou‘ad Sayyid “Le grand palais fatimide au Caire,” in Marianne Barrucand, ed., *L’Égypte fatimide, son art et son histoire* (Paris, 1999), pp. 117–125, in particular fig. 3.

<sup>76</sup> The elongated form of the ancient city would be transformed to such an extent that it became circular, or so the text tells us, a form that the map reiterates by means of an iconographic styleme, attested elsewhere, which is symbolically associated with the image of the perfect city in the ancient Middle East: see Bagnera and Nef, “Histoire et archéologie.”

<sup>77</sup> Thus the map features 12 gates whereas Ibn Ḥawqal mentions only 9 of them, and on it a new barbican linked to the Bāb al-Abnā’ is indicated: *Kitāb Gharā’ib*, *it.*, pp. 419–20.

two aspects, in particular, enable us to compare the layout of the Sicilian capital around the mid-11th century with the reality attested during the later phase of development of Šabra Maṣūriyya,<sup>78</sup> the city which, after the transfer of the Fatimids to Cairo (973), had become the capital of the Zirids, the governors whom the caliphs left in Ifrīqiya and with whom the Kalbids were in close contact.

So far as the organisation of the suburban area to the west of the Casaro was concerned, the indications gleaned from the *Kitāb Gharā'ib al-funūn* with regard to the *ḥārat al-tāj al-dawla*—a quarter whose name refers to the honorific *laqab* of the Kalbid emir Ja'far b. Yūsuf and which is placed by the map in this area—<sup>79</sup> gave us leave to suppose that in it we may recognise one of the noble residences embellished by gardens to which reference was made above.<sup>80</sup> It would therefore testify to the existence in the Kalbid period of a type of settlement reminiscent of the later and most famous Norman places of recreation (*solatia*, like the Cuba, the Cuba Soprana, the Zisa, the Uscibene and so on) that were scattered across the extra-urban royal park of Genoardo (from the Arabic *jannat al-arḍ*, “Earthly Paradise,” see Fig. 3.2, n° 1–3).<sup>81</sup> This hypothesis is further bolstered by Amatus of Montecassino’s account of the capture of Palermo by the Normans, where mention is made of the Christian knights “finding outside the city . . . delightful gardens full of fruit and of water . . . real things and earthly paradises,”<sup>82</sup> which seemed to evoke the type of residences in question.

If it is true that residences embellished with gardens and hydraulic installations (*munya*) are attested on the Islamic shores of the Mediterranean, and more particularly in Ifrīqiya, at any rate from the Aghlabids

<sup>78</sup> The recent archaeological investigations conducted on this site, under the direction of Patrice Cressier and Mourad Rammah, have brought to light numerous, interesting and indeed unexpected aspects of this Fatimid capital in Ifrīqiya; for some of the syntheses already published, see Patrice Cressier and Mourad Rammah, “Šabra al-Mansūriyya. Une nouvelle approche archéologique,” *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres*, 2006, 113–33; Patrice Cressier, “Ville médiévale au Maghreb” in Sénac (ed.), *Villa 4*, pp. 117–40, in particular pp. 128–31.

<sup>79</sup> *Kitāb Gharā'ib*, it., p. 422 and toponym n. 122.

<sup>80</sup> See Bagnera and Nef, “Histoire et archéologie.”

<sup>81</sup> See Guido Di Stefano and Wolfgang Krönig, *Monumenti della Sicilia normanna*, 2° ed. (Palermo, 1979). The Genoardo was situated in the zone nearest to the city, and within the Parco Nuovo, the royal hunting reserve desired by Roger II: *Ibid.*, pp. 90–91, pl. CXXXIII.

<sup>82</sup> Aimé du Mont-Cassin, *Ystoire de li Normant*, ed. Vincenzo De Bartholomaeis (Roma, 1935), XVI, p. 278 (online text: [www.mondimedievali.net/Fonti/secolon.htm](http://www.mondimedievali.net/Fonti/secolon.htm)). See the contribution by Elena Pezzini to the present volume and Ead., “Madinat al-Šiqilliya.”

onwards,<sup>83</sup> it is of particular interest to discover that the recent excavations at Şabra al-Manşūriyya have brought to light a monumental palace of the Zirid period which, dated stratigraphically to the first half of the 11th century,<sup>84</sup> turns out to be associated with artificial water basins and in planimetric terms very similar to the better known examples of Norman Sicily. Featuring a plan centred on a wide, square room, it represents in fact the first known example of an architectural scheme whose origin is obscure but which is frequently employed in the Norman *solatia*.<sup>85</sup> The abovementioned evidence from Şabra lends weight to the hypothesis that Zirid palatine architecture inspired a model already used in Sicily during the Kalbid period when, according to the sources, similar extra-urban residences existed in Palermo. The role of “hunting paradises” certainly played by the Norman *solatia* renders no less intriguing, from this point of view, the fact that, once again at Şabra al-Manşūriyya, analysis of the faunal residues discovered within the walls suggests that hunting parks were attached, as prestige items, to the palatine contexts.<sup>86</sup>

The information recoverable from the sources describing the city between the 10th and the first half of the 11th century therefore indicates that, even during the island’s sole period of dependence, direct or indirect, upon the Fatimid government, the urbanistic history of Palermo was associated with a process of development that was continuous, progressive and, in more than one aspect, apparently consistent with what we know of the capitals which the Fatimids founded on the opposite shore of the Mediterranean, first in Ifrīqiya and then in Egypt. We need now to check whether, and in what way, all of this is borne out by the archaeological evidence, currently dated for the most part to this period between the mid-10th and the mid-11th century.

#### PALERMO BETWEEN THE 10TH AND THE MID-11TH CENTURY: THE MATERIAL EVIDENCE

As regards the changes that, on a different scale, we have so far seen affecting Palermo between 937–938 (the date of the foundation of the Khāliṣa)

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<sup>83</sup> Cf. Solignac, *Recherches sur les installations*, pp. 22–30.

<sup>84</sup> For a more exhaustive analysis one should consult the contributions on the excavations and on palatine architecture in Patrice Cressier and Mourad Rammah, eds., *Şabra al-Manşūriyya*.

<sup>85</sup> Cressier, “Ville médiévale,” p. 130.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

and the late Kalbid period (the more recent interventions would appear to be those attributed by the *Kitāb Gharā'ib al-funūn* to the emir Ja'far b. Yūsuf, 998–1019), the entirety of the archaeological information so far published, though more substantial than for the Aghlabite period, does not appear to be of real help to us here.

We know little or nothing about the Khālīṣa, the putative extension and internal organization of which are still open to debate,<sup>87</sup> and to which as things stand only sporadic material evidence, all clustered around the 10th–11th century, can be referred. This is the case with some fragments of columns discovered at Palazzo Chiaromonte (Steri; see Fig. 3.1, n° 24), which are deemed to belong to buildings contained within the Khālīṣa,<sup>88</sup> and with the earliest phase of a vast semi-hypogeic room brought to light in the area of the same palace.<sup>89</sup> On the other hand, we can date generically to the 10th century a block of tuffaceous rock with an Arabic inscription in Cufic, which, having been discovered in Via Parlamento (see Fig. 3.1, n° 13), may belong to a stretch of the walls enclosing the citadel on the north-western side.<sup>90</sup>

As regards the area inside the ancient fortified nucleus of Madīnat Balarm, where the sources imply the impact of numerous alterations over the years,<sup>91</sup> the archaeological evidence is equally sparse.<sup>92</sup> We have already mentioned the paved brick floor discovered beneath the present-day Norman cathedral (see Fig. 3.1, n° 5 and 6), which, being datable to the mid-10th century onwards, could well represent a phase from the Kalbid

<sup>87</sup> See Pezzini, "Un tratto della cinta muraria," pp. 762–69 and note 174 at p. 763; Ead., "La formazione del quartiere," pp. 36–47; Ead., "Madīnat al-Ṣiqillīya."

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.; see also Giuseppe Spataro, *Nuove ricerche sullo Steri di Palermo* (Palermo, 1984).

<sup>89</sup> Spataro, *Da Panormos a Balarm*, pp. 71–73. The case for this room belonging to a building in the Khālīṣa is suggested both by its location and by the care taken with its realisation: Pezzini, "La formazione del quartiere," p. 47.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. The inscription was first published by Bartolomeo Lagumina, "Palermo. Iscrizione araba," *Notizie degli Scavi di Antichità*, 1899, pp. 305–306; see also Roberta Giunta, "L'epigrafe in arabo di Termini Imerese," in Bagnera, *Archeologia dell'Islam*, pp. 16–19, in particular p. 19 and fig. 4.

<sup>91</sup> Likewise the presence of mosques, workshops, *funduq*-s and *ḥammām*-s mentioned both by Ibn Ḥawqal and by others: cf. De Simone, "Palermo nei geografi," pp. 153, 164, 174; Ead., "Palermo araba," pp. 96–97. Amongst the modifications recorded in the mid-11th century by the *Kitāb Gharā'ib al-funūn* there feature on the map a *ḥammām*, a dwelling of some description and a large open space serving as a market: see *Kitāb Gharā'ib*, it., pp. 420–21, toponyms 117, 118 and 120, figs. 3 and 6.

<sup>92</sup> See Francesca Spataro, "Nuovi dati preliminari sulla topografia di Palermo in età Medievale," *MEFRM* 116–1 (2004), 47–78, in particular pp. 50–60; Ead., *Da Panormos a Balarm*, pp. 55–59.

period in the *masjid al-jāmi'* (see *supra*). Aside from this, one may record the discovery, beneath the Palazzo dei Normanni (see Fig. 3.1, n° 1), of a trampling surface which, dated by pottery to the 10th–11th century, may represent a phase of utilization of the ancient gate with which, on this basis, some have proposed to identify the Bāb al-Riyāḍ (see *supra*) and others the Bāb al-Abnā' mentioned by Ibn Ḥawqal.<sup>93</sup> For the rest, the evidence only concerns materials from the Islamic period recovered from later dumps and infills, namely from the Norman period as in the case of the excavations at the Archbishop's Palace (see Fig. 3.1, n° 4) and in Via D'Alessi (see Fig. 3.1, n° 7).<sup>94</sup>

Conversely, so far as urban expansion *extra-moenia* is concerned, the archaeological evidence is quite abundant. If we set aside the weak evidence for a phase of frequentation dated to the first half of the 10th century at the Museo Archeologico Regionale<sup>95</sup> (see Fig. 3.1, n° 8), the contexts from the Islamic period identified in the areas outside the ancient city are consistently dated to the Kalbid period even if the presence of levels (of settlement or of frequentation) in direct contact with the rocky bed identify them as the earliest stage in the history of local settlement. The present state of archaeological research thus indicates a planned growth that would only have been implemented from the late 10th century onwards. Built structures of high technical quality aligned with regular street systems have been identified in the areas of the Nuova Pretura<sup>96</sup> (see Fig. 3.1, n° 3) and of the Castello S. Pietro quarter<sup>97</sup> (see Fig. 3.1, n° 11), both located in the northern area of the city which falls within the Ḥārat al-Ṣaḡāliba described by Ibn Ḥawqal. Evidence for the existence of a capillary system of storage and of the utilisation of the hydric and alimentary resources is furnished by the frequent presence of wells and silos associated with habitative structures, detected both in the abovementioned area—for which further evidence has been supplied through the excavations conducted at

<sup>93</sup> See Camerata Scovazzo, "Delle antiche cinte murarie," pp. 99–100; D'Angelo "La città di Palermo," p. 12; Spatafora, "Nuovi dati preliminari," pp. 50–51.

<sup>94</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 53–57 and Carmela Angela Di Stefano, "Palermo," *Di terra in terra. Nuove scoperte archeologiche nella Provincia di Palermo* (Palermo, 1991), pp. 255–83.

<sup>95</sup> Elisabeth Lesnes, "La recente ricerca archeologica nel Museo," *Quaderni del Museo Archeologico Regionale "Antonio Salinas"* 3 (1997), 17–61, in particular pp. 18–23.

<sup>96</sup> Fabiola Ardizzone, Lucia Arcifa, "Saggi archeologici nell'area della Nuova Pretura di Palermo," in Di Stefano, Cadei, Andaloro (eds.), *Federico e la Sicilia*, pp. 293–99.

<sup>97</sup> Arcifa *et alii*, "Lo scavo archeologico," p. 33 and figs. 1a–3; Eid, "Palermo, quartier Castello San Pietro;" Jean-Marie Pesez, "Quartier Castello San Pietro," in Di Stefano, Cadei, Andaloro (eds.), *Federico e la Sicilia*, pp. 313–19.

the Museo Archeologico<sup>98</sup> (see Fig. 3.1, n° 8) and at S. Domenico<sup>99</sup> (see Fig. 3.1, n° 10)—and in the south-eastern zone of the city, where a settlement from the Islamic period has been identified on the site of the monastery of the SS. Trinità or Magione<sup>100</sup> (see Fig. 3.1, n° 15). This part of the city likewise contains traces of some contexts associated with attested productive activities, especially from layers with residues from production processes at Palazzo Bonagia<sup>101</sup> (see Fig. 3.1, n° 16) and at Palazzo Sambuca<sup>102</sup> (see Fig. 3.1, n° 17).

Furthermore, archaeological evidence exists that may throw some light upon the organisation of the suburban area to the west of the Cassaro (see Fig. 3.2). Even if they certainly need to be investigated in greater depth, of real interest are the two phases of building which an excavation has brought to light beneath the Norman *solatium* of the Cuba Soprana, now incorporated into the eighteenth-century structures of the Villa Napoli<sup>103</sup> (see Fig. 3.2, n° 1). These two phases, attested by walls and by a system of canalization, do not appear to be furnished with absolute datings. However, the stratigraphic relationship with the Norman building, as well as the use of different construction techniques, raise the question as to whether at least the earliest one can be traced back to the Islamic age. This therefore leads one to wonder whether we are perhaps concerned here with material evidence confirming what we may infer from the written source regarding the presence, even in the Islamic period, of nobiliary

<sup>98</sup> See Lesnes, "La recente ricerca."

<sup>99</sup> Pietro Giordano, "Saggi archeologici nel chiostro di S. Domenico in Palermo," *MEFRM* 105/2 (1993), 535–47.

<sup>100</sup> Di Stefano, "Palermo," pp. 271–75; D'Angelo, Garofano, "Scavi al convento della SS. Trinità;" Di Stefano *et alii*, "Palermo. Ricerche archeologiche."

<sup>101</sup> Here a layer containing debris of melted metal and ash associated with materials dated to the 11th century lay on top of the structures of habitation perhaps datable to the 9th–10th century: see *supra* and note 30.

<sup>102</sup> In this case all there is to go on is a layer containing traces of combustion, metal debris and waste material from pottery production: Spatafora, *Da Panormus a Balarm*, pp. 65–66.

<sup>103</sup> Of the two phases, the oldest is represented by a thick wall (m. 0.83 wide) built up out of "regular blocks of calcarenite bound together by earth mortar," following a building technique quite "different from that used on the other medieval structures preserved *in situ*," Fabiola Ardizzone, "Palermo. Villa Napoli : Scavi 1998-Notizie preliminari," in Rosa Maria Carra Bonacasa, "Monreale. Palermo: ricerche di archeologia medievale," *Kokalos*, 43–44, II/2, pp. 600–605. The structures in question delineate the rectangular perimeter of the Norman (12th century) edifice, to which an artificial water basin was attached: Carra Bonacasa, "Monreale. Palermo," pp. 593–94 and figs. 3–4. For the more recent excavations see also Spatafora, *Da Panormus a Balarm*, pp. 75–77.

residences embellished with water and with gardens in the area outside the Cassaro (see *supra*).

Finally, according to the archaeological evidence, it was also mainly between the second half of the 10th and the first half of the 11th century that the two Islamic cemeteries attested in Palermo consistently located, in line with the preferred choice of many port cities in the Muslim world, in two zones very close to the sea (see Fig. 3.2). The existence of a *maqbara* (cemetery) in the north-eastern area of the city (see Fig. 3.2, n° 11) is borne out by a series of stratified graves recently discovered in the area of the Castello a Mare<sup>104</sup> (see Fig. 3.1, n° 12), which could indicate, as has already been said, an extension towards the shoreline of the cemetery attested from the 9th century in the area of Castello S. Pietro (see Fig. 3.1, n° 11; see *supra*). In addition, a second, multilayered cemetery, extending a considerable distance and with a complex and diversified internal structure, occupied a large zone to the south-east of the city<sup>105</sup> (see Fig. 3.2, n° 12). Regarding a dating that in this case refers only to the later period in the Islamic history of Palermo, one is bound to ask oneself whether greater attention ought not to be paid to the evidence provided by the typological differentiation of the tombs.<sup>106</sup> As has been demonstrated for cases that are archaeologically well-known in the Islamic world, and notably in Spain, where this kind of research has been pursued with particular intensity, this type of evidence can provide fairly accurate historical information. It might well, for example, contribute to a better understanding of the original moment of installation, and thereby help establish a *terminus post quem* for the phases of development of the vast *maqbara* area south-east of Palermo, if account is taken of the recorded presence there of some graves with a lateral closing.<sup>107</sup> This type of tomb is in fact attested in Spanish contexts as early as the 9th century onwards, for example in the Puerta de Toledo cemetery in Zaragoza and above all in the multilayered Marroquès Bajos cemetery in Jaen, in which a correlation between the

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., pp. 73–75.

<sup>105</sup> The extension of this cemetery can be deduced of the localisation of sepultures, often multi-layered, in the areas indicated at Fig. 3.1, n° 18, 19, 20 and 22. See Spatafora, “Nuovi dati preliminari,” pp. 68–70, 75–77, figs. 6, 9, 12–14, 16 and Elena Pezzini, “Problemi di topografia,” in Alessandra Bagnera, Elena Pezzini, “I cimiteri di rito musulmano nella Sicilia medievale. Dati e problemi,” *MEFRM* 116/1 (2004), 234–59, in particular, pp. 243–44, 255–57.

<sup>106</sup> See Alessandra Bagnera, “Note sulle modalità di sepoltura nelle necropoli di rito musulmano della Sicilia medievale (X–XIII secolo),” in Bagnera, Pezzini, “I cimiteri di rito musulmano,” pp. 259–302, in particular pp. 267–71, 284, 286–97, with bibliography.

<sup>107</sup> See Ibid., pp. 290–91.

site's different phases and the variations evident in the funerary rite is archaeologically demonstrated.<sup>108</sup>

### CONCLUSIONS

The information which derives from the archaeological evidence relating to Islamic Palermo thus conjures up a picture of an urban reality which must in every aspect have undergone a sudden, rapid process of definition from the second half of the 10th century onwards. This picture, characterised by a belated and accelerated development, to be attributed thus to the Kalbids alone, does not appear entirely compatible with a trajectory which the documentary sources allow us to delineate in a more gradual fashion, and which a dating, on stratigraphic grounds, of the *maqbara* of Castello S. Pietro (see Fig. 3.1, n° 11 and 3.2, n° 11; see *supra*) to some point in the 9th century justifies us in regarding as initiated long before.

The real identification of the dynamics through which Palermo must have structured its *facies* in the Islamic period can obviously not disregard the support historical sources may derive from the archaeological evidence, the correct interpretation of which should entail a revision of the chronological markers and, first and foremost, that of glazed pottery with polychrome decoration.<sup>109</sup>

Furthermore, in order to reconsider the important questions of a historical, topographic and urbanistic order that still remain open, and likewise in order to place new researches on a sound footing, it might also prove helpful to shift the vantage point from which we have hitherto looked at Islamic Palermo. A major contribution in this respect may be made by the recent research into the medieval cities of the Maghreb, which provide access to new evidence and suggest new methodological approaches regarding the origin, morphology, environmental impact, integration into trade networks etc. of the cities founded between the 9th and the 12th century.<sup>110</sup> On the other hand, the criteria by which Palermo was recast were themselves new, restructuring the urban layout through the

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<sup>108</sup> See José Luis Serrano Peña, Juan Carlos Castillo Armenteros, "Las necrópolis medievales de Marroquíes Bajos, (Jaen). Avance de las investigaciones arqueológicas," *Arqueología y Territorio Medieval* 7 (2000), 93–120; Pilar Galvé Izquierdo and José A. Benavente Serrano, "La necrópolis islámica de la Puerta de Toledo de Zaragoza," in *Actas IV Congreso de Arqueología Medieval Española, (Alicante, 1993)* (Alicante, 1995), pp. 383–90.

<sup>109</sup> See *supra* and note 6.

<sup>110</sup> See Cressier, "Ville médiévale."

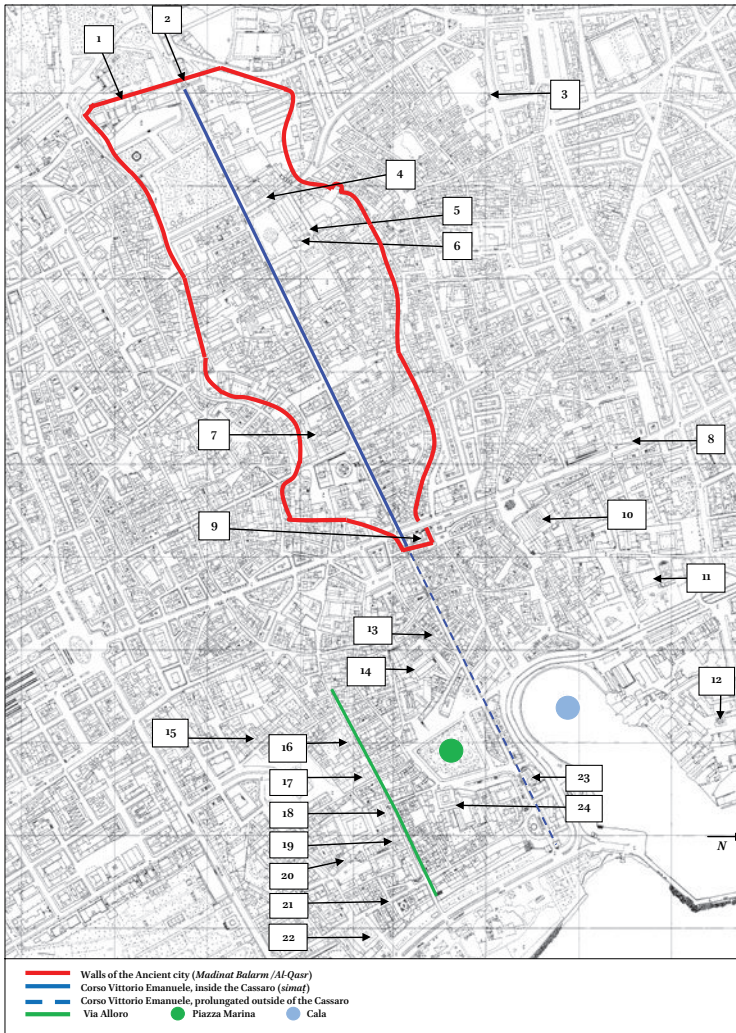


expansion beyond the ancient nucleus of the Cassaro which was launched with the foundation by the Fatimids in 937–38 of the Khālīṣa. On the basis of this plan the city acquired the poly-nuclear structure brought back to life for us by Ibn Ḥawqal and subsequently by the *Kitāb Gharāʾib al-funūn* (see Fig. 3.2); a city whose evolution seems moreover to have borne in mind the models, apparently always updated, of the various capitals in the Fatimid area.

To focus upon the grid of analysis, taking on board the problems and the advances arising out of the most recent researches into Islamic Sicily, but also the far-reaching implications of those conducted up until now in the Maghreb and in Ifrīqiya, essentially entails situating the questions raised by the genesis of Palermo in a novel perspective,<sup>111</sup> thereby also inserting the Sicilian capital into the lively debate about the processes of urban structuring and about the profile of the Islamic mediaeval cities.

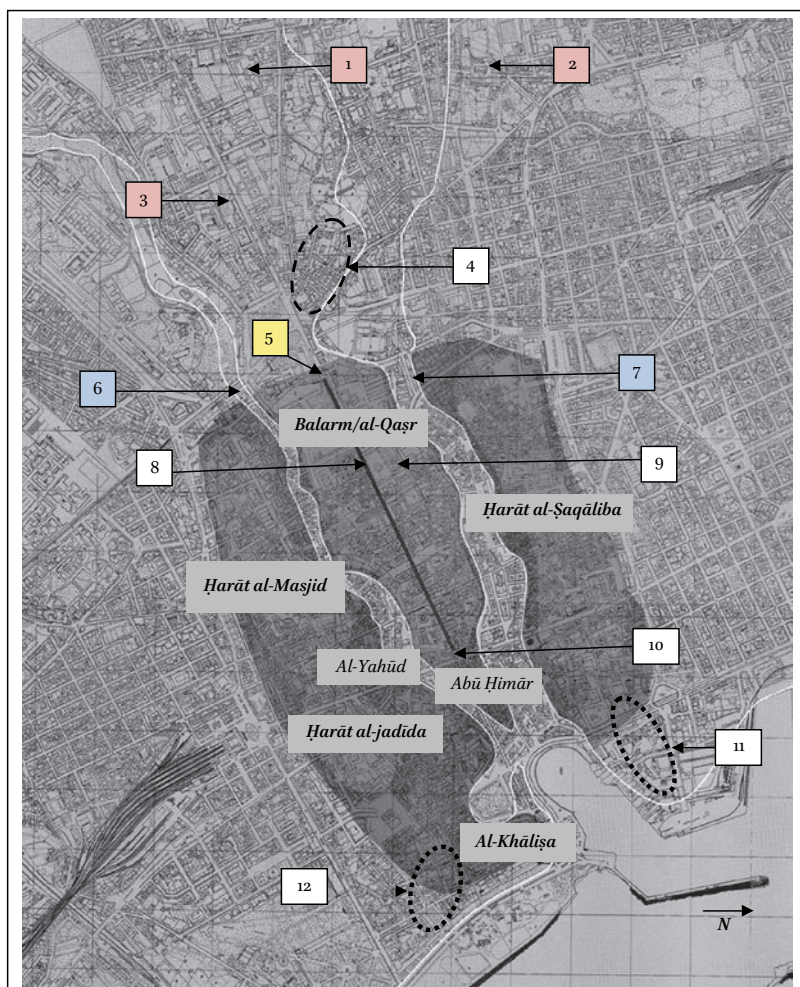
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<sup>111</sup> See Bagnera, “Palermo in età islamica.”



1- Palazzo dei Normanni, Sale del Duca di Montalto; 2- Porta Nuova; 3- Nuova Pretura; 4- Palazzo Arcivescovile; 5- Via dell'Incoronazione; 6- Cattedrale; 7- Via D'Alessi; 8- Museo Archeologico Regionale "Antonio Salinas"; 9- Porta dei Patitelli (*Bāb al-Bahr*); 10- San Domenico, Chiostro; 11- Quartiere Castello-S. Pietro: area del Saggio B; 12- Castello a Mare (Torre Mastra); 13- Via del Parlamento; 14- San Francesco, Convento; 15- SS. Trinità (Magione), Convento; 16- Palazzo Bonagia; 17- Palazzo Sambuca; 18- Chiesa della Gancia; 19- Palazzo Abatellis; 20- Oratorio dei Bianchi; 21- Via Torremuzza; 22- Piazza Kalsa; 23- Santa Maria della Catena; 24- Palazzo Chiaromonte (Steri);

Fig. 3.1. Map of Palermo giving the location of the various sites from the Islamic period and of the monuments mentioned in the text (Map based upon Carta Tecnica 1 : 5000, Soprintendenza BB.CC.AA. di Palermo, Ritaglio Foglio 5011 and designed by A. Bagnera)



N° Areas

N° Norman *solacia*

N° Gate of the XVIth century

N° Rivers

1- Villa Napoli (Cuba Soprana); 2- La Zisa; 3- La Cuba; 4- Quartiere di Denisinni (parte del *Mu'askar*?); 5- Porta Nuova (XVI sec.); 6- River Kemonia; 7- River Papireto (*Wādī al-Rūṭa*); 8- Corso Vittorio Emanuele (*simat*); 9- Cathedral (*maṣjīd al-jāmi'*?); 10- Porta dei Patitelli (*Bāb al-Baḥr*); 11- Cemetery (*Maqbara* North-east, hypothetical extension); 12- Cemetery (*Maqbara* South-west; hypothetical extension)

Fig. 3.2. Map of Palermo showing the location of Norman *solacia* (12th century) in relation to the Islamic city in the western suburban zone and of the Porta Nuova (16th century) (Map, and the location of the quarters mentioned by Ibn Ḥawqal (973), based upon Spatafora, "Da Panormos a Balarm", fig. at p. 25; graphic A. Bagnera)

PALERMO EXPERIENCED, PALERMO IMAGINED.  
ARABIC AND ISLAMIC CULTURE BETWEEN THE 9TH AND  
THE 12TH CENTURY

Mirella Cassarino

In order to delineate the characteristics of Arabic and of the cultures that were expressed in Arabic in Palermo between the 9th and the 12th centuries, it is necessary to entertain some preliminary considerations, which are closely interlinked and which concern not only the themes at issue, the timespan and the sites in which they are inscribed, but also the complex perspectives implicit in the very concept of culture.

First of all, the choice to employ in my title the term “Arabic” and not “the Arabic language” stems from the now scientifically established fact that linguistic—that is, stylistic, dialectal and sociolinguistic—variation is inherent in the history of Arabic. This history, one yet to be written so far as the Maghribian area is concerned, implies, in the case of Sicily also, an approach which takes into account the recent advances in dialectology through which we are able to appraise, where documentation is available, not only the classical language, *fushà* or *faṣīḥa*, and the texts produced in it, but also mixed varieties and fragmentary dialectal realities.<sup>1</sup> Such varieties depend upon historical and linguistic antecedents, and therefore upon the process of Arabisation in Sicily, upon the linguistic baggage of the conquerors, upon the pre-existing elements from other dialectal areas, as well as on the substrate and adstrate languages.<sup>2</sup>

Sicily under Islamic domination presents the same characteristics as may be found in other conquered territories. Relations within Islam itself and within the other social contexts, and between a dominant Islam and the dominated Christian and Jewish religious communities were somewhat

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<sup>1</sup> It was with this aim in mind that GIRAS (Gruppo Internazionale di Ricerca sull'Arabo di Sicilia) was founded in 2005. Amongst the first fruits of the investigations conducted by certain members of the group, let me simply mention the publication of the *XII Incontro di Linguistica Camito-semitica (Afroasiatica)*. *Atti*, ed. Marco Moriggi (Soveria Mannelli, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> See Adalgisa De Simone, *Spoglio antroponimico delle giaride arabo-greche dei diplomi editi da Salvatore Cusa* (Rome, 1979); Dionysius A. Agius, *Siculo Arabic* (London, 1996) and Alex Metcalfe, *Muslims and Christians in Norman Sicily. Arabic Speakers and the End of Islam* (London, 2003).

complex and conflict-ridden. For some years now we have been witness to a progressive dismantling of the traditional, ideologically slanted historiographical literature, which describes the expansion of Islam as rapid and total, despite the complex processes which are connoted by it and which certainly must also have occurred in Sicily, where some Christian communities, for the most part located in the north-eastern part of the island, continued to subsist<sup>3</sup> and where Christians employed Greek and Arabic to express themselves, even in writing.<sup>4</sup> A number of studies, serving to present recently discovered texts or to propose unfamiliar interpretations of already known materials, have played a crucial role in consolidating this picture.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, it is necessary to refer to the presence of the Jews in Sicily, a topic covered in the present volume by Giuseppe Mandalà. My own concern here is simply to recall that it is to them that we owe the survival of Arabic written in Hebrew characters,<sup>6</sup> in the centuries from the Islamic conquest up until the expulsion in 1492. Nor, finally, should we forget, even if the topic transcends Palermo, the role of the Berbers, studied by

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<sup>3</sup> See Vera von Falkenhausen, "Il monachesimo Greco in Sicilia," in Cosimo D. Fonseca, ed., *La Sicilia rupestre nel contesto delle civiltà mediterranee* (Galatina, 1986), pp. 135–74; Henri Bresc, "Arab Christians in the Western Mediterranean (XIth–XIIIth Centuries)," *Library of Mediterranean History* 1 (1994), 3–45; id., "La propriété foncière des musulmans dans la Sicile du XII<sup>e</sup> siècle: trois documents inédits," in *Del nuovo sulla Sicilia musulmana (Atti della Giornata di Studio, Roma, 3 maggio 1993)* (Rome, 1995), pp. 69–97; id. and Annliese Nef, "Les mozarabes de Sicile (1100–1300)," in Enrico Cuzzo and Jean-Marie Martin, eds., *Cavalieri alla conquista del Sud. Studi sull'Italia normanna in memoria di Léon-Robert Ménager* (Rome and Bari, 1998), pp. 134–56 and Annliese Nef, "L'histoire des 'mozarabes' de Sicile. Bilan provisoire et nouveaux matériaux," in Cyrille Aillet, Maite Penelas, Philippe Roisse, eds., *Existe una identida mozárabe?* (Madrid, 2008), pp. 273–277; Benedetto Clausi and Vincenza Milazzo, "La città medievale dai Bizantini agli Aragonesi," in Fulvio Mazza, ed., *Catania. Storia Cultura Economia. Le città della Sicilia* (Soveria Mannelli, 2008), pp. 79–163; Giuseppe Mandalà and Marcello Moscone, "Tra latini, greci e 'arabici': ricerche su scrittura e cultura a Palermo fra XII e XIII secolo," *Segno e Testo* 7 (2009), 174–231.

<sup>4</sup> Metcalfe, *Muslims and Christians in Norman Sicily*, pp. 15–21.

<sup>5</sup> I would like to thank Giuseppe Mandalà, who has informed me of the future publication of the edition and translation in al-Qanṭara of a treatise in Arabic on martyrdom, first presented at the International Conference *The Legal Status of Dhimmis in the Muslim West in the Middle Ages*, held in Madrid, 24–25th March 2011. See also Annliese Nef, "Le statut des *dhimmī*-s dans la Sicile aghlabide (827–910)," forthcoming in the Proceedings of the above-mentioned Conference.

<sup>6</sup> See Giuseppe Mandalà, "Un codice arabo in caratteri ebraici dalla Trapani degli Abbate (Vat. ebr. 358)," *Sefarad* 71/1 (2011), 7–24. See also Henri Bresc, *Livre et société en Sicile (1299–1499)* (Palermo, 1971).

Leonard Chiarelli.<sup>7</sup> New sources, as and when they come to light, will perhaps in future allow us to assess their linguistic practices in Sicily.<sup>8</sup>

The picture is further complicated, however, by the chronotopical dimension in which we move here. The centuries between the 9th and the 13th are marked by the advent of a sequence of different forms of domination: Islamic, with its various dynasties, Norman, and Swabian, and these in the course of a few centuries gave rise to important and complex processes of linguistic, social, economic and political change, and of acculturation. It is therefore not by chance that what we might define as phases of relative adjustment, namely, the Kalbid (948–c. 1040) and Norman interludes (1072–1189), should have seemed to be the most significant and flourishing periods so far as cultural production is concerned.

The question of periodisation is therefore of fundamental importance if we are to distinguish the different phases and modalities which have characterised the presence and status of Arabic and Islam in Sicily. From 827 up until the Norman conquest, in the mid-11th century, the island was, at first in part and then entirely, a region within the *dār al-Islām*, that is to say, a land directly under Islamic jurisdiction, initially ruled by governors appointed by the Aghlabid emirs of Qayrawān, and then, from c. 910, coming under the domination of the Fatimids, and finally, from 948, being entrusted by the latter to the Kalbid dynasty, which governed the island quite independently. Once the Kalbid emirate had collapsed, Sicily was plunged into a phase of disorder and conflict (*fitna*) engendered by three leaders, two of them Berbers, who fought for overall supremacy.<sup>9</sup> After a long, hotly contested war waged between 1060 and 1091, the militias led by the Hauteville won back the island for Christendom. Sicily became a place of emigration and a land inhabited by Islamic communities subservient to Christian sovereigns, initially the Norman Hauteville and then the Hohenstaufen, up until the deportation of the Muslims to Lucera, in 1246, by Frederick II. With the coming of the Normans, the Islamic communities'

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<sup>7</sup> See "The Ibadya in Muslim Sicily. From the Conquest to Lucera?", abstract of the communication presented by this same scholar to the Symposium held at the Università di Napoli "L'Orientale" from 28 to 30 May 2012, *Ibady Theology. Rereading Sources and Scholarly Works* ([http://www.unior.it/doc\\_db/doc\\_obj\\_7004\\_31-03-2012\\_4f771934591cc.pdf](http://www.unior.it/doc_db/doc_obj_7004_31-03-2012_4f771934591cc.pdf)). See also his recent volume, *A History of Muslim Sicily* (Malta, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> See Metcalfe, *Muslims and Christians*, p. 176.

<sup>9</sup> For a clear survey of the more complex, and less known periods in the history of Sicily, I refer the reader to Jeremy Johns, "Arabic Sources for Sicily," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 132 (2007), 341–60 and Ferdinando Maurici, *Castelli medievali della Sicilia. Dai Bizantini ai Normanni* (Palermo, 1992).

circumstances wholly altered, and they thus came to be enclosed within a regime of coexistence, one which was not always peaceful, and which was multi-ethnic (the Helleno-Byzantine peoples of Sicily, Arabs, Berbers, Andalusians, Jews and Latins of diverse origin), multicultural and pluriconfessional (Judaism, Christianity, various forms of Islam), a state of affairs caused by very specific choices and cultural policies, which were far from idyllic, and which were designed to spread and propagate the ideology of the newly established sovereign power both inside and outside the kingdom.<sup>10</sup> Arabic, however, continued to be one of the three official languages employed.<sup>11</sup> Although still in evidence at the time of the emperor Frederick, its place, and that of Islamic culture itself, had altered, and in any case his reign falls outside the bounds of the present chapter.<sup>12</sup> In taking the measure of the chronology, that is, the sequence of periods of Islamic, Norman and Swabian domination, of fundamental importance in any reconstruction of cultural life in Sicily, it is however necessary to grasp its enmeshing, at any rate in the first phase, with events in Islam in general and in Maghribian Islam in particular, since the latter was configured as a “Mediterranean” phenomenon. Implicit in this approach, but sometimes taken for granted and never sufficiently emphasised, is the question of the definition of “Middle Ages” applied to the cultural, social and political history of Islam in centuries which coincide, in part, with the period under review in the present contribution. The years which, in the “Eurocentric” system of periodisation of world history, were considered to be a phase of obscurantism, coincided with the moment of maximal Islamic expansion and with the development of the corresponding cultural system.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, the spaces in which cultural production should be set likewise merit some preliminary consideration: if we except the Norman period, it is not always an easy matter to isolate Palermo geographically from the more complex Sicilian and Maghribian realities.<sup>14</sup> During the Islamic

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<sup>10</sup> Gianvito Resta, “La cultura siciliana dell’età normanna,” in *Atti del Congresso Internazionale di Studi sulla Sicilia normanna (Palermo, 4–8 dicembre 1972)* (Palermo, 1973), pp. 263–78.

<sup>11</sup> Karla Mallette, “Translating Sicily,” *Medieval Encounters* 9/1 (2003), 140–63.

<sup>12</sup> I would refer the reader to the chapter in the book by Benoît Grévin.

<sup>13</sup> See Leonardo Capezzone, *La trasmissione del sapere nell’Islam medievale* (Roma, 1998); Bianca Scarcia Amoretti, “Profilo della realtà arabo-islamica medievale,” in Bianca Scarcia Amoretti, ed., *Lo spazio letterario del medioevo 3. Le culture circostanti. II, La cultura arabo-islamica*, (Rome, 2003), pp. 67–106.

<sup>14</sup> Annliese Nef and Vivien Prigent, eds., *La Sicile de Byzance à l’Islam* (Paris, 2010).

phase, Sicily entered with full rights into the orbit of Maghribian Islam, long perceived to be alien and marginal by the Arabs from the East. The principal points of reference were Tunisia, and Qayrawān in particular, Egypt and al-Andalus. What Shawqī Dayf asserts in his history of literature, which includes a section dedicated to Sicily, that no important book composed in Qayrawān ever failed to reach the island,<sup>15</sup> should be extended to all spheres of knowledge that were cultivated here.

Cultural production in Palermo, or related to that city, will be considered, for the above-mentioned reasons, both in the context of the real, complex, dialectical relationship between residence and place of passage, and in the context of literary construction and hence as a space, even a symbolic one, sedimented within those representations of the imaginary, sometimes with an ideological connotation, which enabled Arabic language authors to represent, recast and reinvent Sicily and its capital city. I will likewise strive, to the degree that the sources permit such a reconstruction, to bring out, sometimes in filigree, the developments of cultural life, considering them both at court and in the spaces beyond it.

The approach that I will adopt is that of cultural studies, an approach well-suited to the actual structure which presides over the articulation of knowledge in Islamic civilisation, characterised from its origins by “modernity,” both with regard to contents (one merely has to consider the progress achieved in the field of the sciences, the work of al-Idrīsī being the emblematic example here), and with respect to its particular epistemological stance and the modes of its structuration, manifestation and transmission. Such an approach, disregarding divisions between the various humanities, addressing the relationship between knowledge and power, and recovering aesthetics as a discipline attuned to the phenomenon of artistic sensibility, may be better suited to grasping the characteristics of Sicilian production in Arabic, too often defined as “conventional” or “repetitive” and considered solely in relation to its in fact by no means negligible documentary value.

#### RELIGIOUS LIFE

As is the case in all conquered territories, it is reasonable to suppose that in Sicily also the first act of the invaders was to put down roots and to

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<sup>15</sup> See vol. 9 of the *Ta'riḫ al-adab al-'arabī* [History of Arabic Literature], entitled *'Asr al-duwal wa'l-imārāt. Libiyā, Tūnis, Saqalliyya* (Cairo, 1992), p. 360.



nurture their own culture. Consider, for example, the fact that the above-mentioned Asad b. al-Furāt, carefully chosen by the emir Ziyādat Allāh di Qayrawān as commander-in-chief of the troops that had landed on the island, was a celebrated and brilliant jurisconsult.<sup>16</sup> He had been the personal pupil of Mālik b. Anas in Medina and had benefited from the teaching of various disciples of Abū Ḥanīfa in 'Irāq. He had himself composed an important legal work entitled *Asadiyya*, and in Ifrīqiya he had become a judge and an expert in the science of *ḥadīth*. The surviving testimonies, though in large part subsequent to the actual phase of conquest, show us a Palermo—revealingly named as the city of the Prophet, al-Madīna,<sup>17</sup> or compared with other significant cities like al-Fustat, the ancient Cairo—that is an important centre, and not only spiritually, of Maghribian Islam.

Amongst the sources at our disposal, travel accounts merit fresh scrutiny, owing to the nature of the narratives they contain and the propensity of the narrators to use them to recast their experience.<sup>18</sup> If, as is well known, they were used as guides by the traveller-pilgrim, to whom they must have offered information of a practical and religious nature, they also often became a narration of personal experience, displaying the narrator's own points of view, impressions and idiosyncrasies. The travel diary thus ended up shedding the vaguer aspects of the genre and emerging as one of the modes of the *adab*.<sup>19</sup> Precisely because this textual typology was inscribed in a complex scriptorial tradition, which often availed itself of the quotation of passages and descriptions by others, in which report and memorialistic narration ran seamlessly one into the other, we need to reassess its documentary value and to clarify how useful it is for the

<sup>16</sup> On this figure: Annliese Nef, "Comment les Aghlabides ont décidé de conquérir la Sicile . . .", *Annales islamologiques* 45 (2011), 191–212.

<sup>17</sup> See Umberto Rizzitano, *Storia e cultura della Sicilia saracena* (Palermo, 1975), p. 152; Adalgisa De Simone, "Palermo nei geografi e viaggiatori arabi del Medioevo," *Studi Maghribini* 2 (1968), 129–89; p. 134.

<sup>18</sup> Emanuele Kanceff, "Il viaggio e le sue letture: prolegomeni a un discorso di metodo," in Giovanna Scianatico and Raffaele Ruggiero, eds., *Questioni odepatiche. Modelli e momenti del viaggio Adriatico* (Bari, 2007), pp. 65–76.

<sup>19</sup> On *adab*, a polysemic term customarily used to refer to works whose purpose was to transmit knowledge using, in addition, *delectatio*, I shall simply refer here to Seger Adrian Bonebakker, "Adab and the Concept of Belles-Lettres," in Julia Ashtiany *et al*, eds., *Abbasid Belles-Lettres* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 16–30 and *On Fiction and Adab in Medieval Arabic Literature*, ed. Philip Kennedy (Wiesbaden, 2005). For *adab* as system within which different literary modes may be identified, I will take the liberty of referring to Mirella Cassarino, "Système, genre et mode dans la littérature arabe classique," *Synergies, Monde arabe* 6 (2009), 55–71.

purposes of historical reconstruction. One of the most important areas in which it can help to shed light is precisely that of the history of mentalities, inasmuch as the dimension of self-scrutiny expresses a particular and original mode of perceiving and representing otherness and elsewhere. The representation of Palermo and of the Palermitans evident in the works of Ibn Ḥawqal and of Ibn Jubayr embodies a tension between the authors' preoccupation with their own self-image and place of origin and the novelty represented by the experience of the other lived by both men in the first person and recounted in two different works subject to their own particular logic. Each text contains a series of *topoi* suspended in a fine mesh of cross-references which are not always readily traceable. This accounts for the caricatural image of the Sicilians, encountered when the island was in the middle of the Kalbid regency, which Ibn Ḥawqal depicts in his *Kitāb Ṣūrat al-arḍ*, at many points relying on the earlier account of al-Iṣṭakhri (who died in 951). When appraising Ibn Ḥawqal's travel narrative, a further set of elements needs to be taken into account. First of all, we should bear in mind the fact of his coming originally from the Mashriq, having been born and having lived for a time in the region of the Jazīra, in Upper Mesopotamia, where the Maghrib must long have been viewed as alien and marginal; furthermore, although it is by no means certain that he was a supporter of the Fatimid *da'wa*, we can nonetheless affirm, not least because of the professions of faith to be found in his writings, that he sympathised with their policy.<sup>20</sup> His work could therefore give voice to a disillusion deriving from the realisation that Sicily retained little of the Fatimid character of the Empire.<sup>21</sup> All these elements help to make up the tessellae of a representation of a Muslim world marked by a pronounced "otherness," alien to the mental panorama of this traveller, and to explain the distorted image of the Sicilians, verging on that of the "noble savage," which he projected. In general, moreover, the geographers and travellers of the period had recourse to a "proto-ethnological" approach, their aim being to represent the territories visited through the points of similitude or contrast between their own culture and those of others.

It is therefore no accident that the description of Palermo left to us by Ibn Jubayr is markedly different from that of Ibn Ḥawqal, and not only on

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<sup>20</sup> See André Miquel, "Ibn Hawkal", in *El2*, III, pp. 810–11 and *La géographie humaine du monde musulman jusqu'au milieu du XI<sup>e</sup> s.* (Paris, 1967), pp. 299–309.

<sup>21</sup> Yann Dejugnat, *Le voyage d'Occident et d'Orient des lettrés d'al-Andalus: genèse et affirmation d'une culture du voyage (XI<sup>e</sup>–XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, Thèse de doctorat, Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne, 2010.

account of the temporal disjuncture between the two works. Ibn Jubayr was a pious man, who appears to have been committed to teaching the Tradition and Sufism; he came from al-Andalus, and therefore from a part of the Maghrib which had much in common with Sicily, as he himself says in defining it, and not by chance, as the latter's sister in many respects, in its fertility, its wealth, its art and its grandeur; and, finally, he visited Palermo at a time when the Normans were its undisputed rulers. His "gaze" seems to be imbued with exoticism, on account of the fascination exercised on him by an unknown place, and with a note of melancholy, because the Island was now a space "lost" to Islam, a sentiment heightened by the Reconquista just then under way in the Iberian peninsula.<sup>22</sup>

Taking into account the above-mentioned aspects, which follow from the adaptation evident in the two authors' cognitive structures, these last being conditioned in their turn by cultural background, such works offer valuable insights into religious life in Islamic Palermo. Numerous mosques were to be found there, according to Ibn Ḥawqal (who died c. 981) and al-Muqaddasī, both of whom lived in the 10th century, and likewise according to later travellers, amongst them Ibn Jubayr (died 1217), who visited the city between the end of 1184 and the beginning of 1185.

It is not easy to establish with any certainty exactly which forms of Islam were professed in Sicily in the first two centuries of the Conquest. Although the majority of Muslims on the island were in all probability loyal to the Sunni tendency, the situation, as in the other Muslim territories, must have been more complex than it appears in the very scarce contemporary testimonies. We must bear in mind that, from c. 910 and for over a century, the Island was ruled by a succession of Fatimid caliphs, who, as is well known, upheld the *da'wa* of the Ismailian *shī'a*, and, though always in a minority, here too followers of Shi'ism cannot have been lacking. Close scrutiny of the Shi'ite sources might serve to enhance our understanding of Fatimid history in Sicily and in the Muslim West in general.<sup>23</sup>

A study by François Déroche of the corpus of Maghribian parchment Korans has described in detail a manuscript preserved in the Nuruosmaniye Library of Istanbul whose decorative motifs recall "the painted

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<sup>22</sup> Yann Dejugnat, "Voyage au centre du monde. Logiques narratives et cohérence du projet dans la Rihla d'Ibn Jubayr," in Henri Bresc and Emmanuelle Tixier Du Mesnil, eds., *Géographes et voyageurs au Moyen Âge* (Nanterre, 2010), pp. 163–207.

<sup>23</sup> Some scholars, among them Farhat Dachraoui, *Le Califat Fatimide au Maghrib (909–975)* (Tunis, 1981) and Antonino Pellitteri, *I Fatimidi e la Sicilia (sec. X)* (Palermo, 1997), actually go so far as to speak of reappraising, correcting and revising their history.

inscriptions of the friezes” in the Great Mosque of Qayrawān.<sup>24</sup> In the colophon, which gives the place and date of the copy’s execution, we read that it was carried out “bi-Madīnat Ṣiqilliya,”<sup>25</sup> in the year 372 of the Hegira (982–983). The citation of verses 77–80 of the *sūra* LVI within one decoration<sup>26</sup> and, in particular, of verse 78 which refers to the “Kitāb maknūn” (the “hidden book”), alludes to an anti-mutazilite profession of faith. This particular copy’s date of execution tallies with that of the death of the third Kalbid emir, Ali b. Ḥasan, whose reign coincided with a period of glorious achievement for Islamic Sicily, which depended only nominally on the Fatimid Caliphate of Cairo. The use of such a formula, which was fairly widespread in the Maghrib in this period, suggests that in all probability the controversy over the created or uncreated nature of the sacred text was still a real preoccupation in this part of the Maghrib. Furthermore, we know that these same themes, such as predestination or the created or uncreated nature of the Koran, debated in other Islamic centres of the Mashriq,<sup>27</sup> were of central importance to scholars of *fiqh* and of theology in Qayrawān. It is well known that the Maghribian city was a nest of sects and of beliefs: Kharijism had assumed a certain importance, so much so that the relevant theology was taught in some institutions; Murgite ‘*ulamā*’ were likewise active there, and Mu’tazilism, professed at the Aghlabid court, must have been practised by many intellectuals, even if they were in a minority and already in decline. Given such a complex picture, and taking into account the mobility of Muslim scholars, who, through travel, devoted themselves to research and to the transmission of knowledge, one may suppose that the copy of the Koran in question is proof of the richness of cultural life and of the debates in course even in Palermo. The exquisite workmanship lavished on the book could perhaps reflect a desire, on the part of the court, to leave a mark of its own might and greatness in the context of the campaign, under way throughout the Maghrib, to promote the Sunni tendency.

Furthermore, the *taṣawwuf*, that is, Sufism, was probably not unknown in Sicily from the Kalbid period on, and practised by various *awlīyā*’

<sup>24</sup> François Déroche, “Cercles et entrelacs: format et décor des corans maghrébins médiévaux,” *Comptes-rendus des stances de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 145<sup>e</sup> année/1 (2001), 593–620.

<sup>25</sup> Which is what Palermo is called in various testimonies from geographers, travellers and poets, but also on coins: Giovanni Oman, s.v. “Siḳilliyya,” *El2*, IX, p. 612.

<sup>26</sup> Déroche, “Cercles et entrelacs,” p. 601.

<sup>27</sup> Ḥasan Ḥusni ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, *Waraqāt ‘an al-ḥaḍāra al-‘arabiyya bi-l-Ifriqiyyā al-tūnisīyya* (Tunis, 1965–1966).

*Allāh*<sup>28</sup> (“intimates of God” or Muslim saints), some of whom were authors of important works. One merely has to consider Abū Bakr al-Samanṭārī (died 1072), author of the *Guide for Seekers after Spiritual Perfection*, in 10 volumes,<sup>29</sup> or Abū ʿl-Qāsim al-Ṣiqillī (died c. 996),<sup>30</sup> who would seem to have introduced Sufi ideas into the Maghrib and composed, among other works, some of which are even today still unpublished, an important treatise entitled *The Lights of the Science of Secrets and the Stations*, better known as *Anwār al-Ṣiqillī* (*The Lights of al-Ṣiqillī*).<sup>31</sup> The words used by Ibn Jubayr to describe the *ribāṭ* of Qaṣr Saʿd, a site close to Palermo, which he visited in 1184, during the reign of William II, are very telling. This site seems to have been a place of pilgrimage, inhabited by persons who were temperate and “dedicated to the ascetic life.”<sup>32</sup> Of particular interest to us, because it confirms that such places already existed in the 10th century, is the glimpse Ibn Ḥawqal, Ibn Jubayr’s successor, offers us of the *ribāṭāt*, half hermitages and half fortresses, situated on the coast.<sup>33</sup> Ibn Ḥawqal describes them as places in which there gathered the most motley and depraved people, incapable of distinguishing what was *farḍ*, that is, a believer’s obligation, from what was *sunna*, that is, custom. Such places were, he said, inhabited by personages who, instead of swelling the ranks of those devoted to the *jihād*, proved to be false mystics devoid of any sincere religious sentiment.<sup>34</sup>

The pious practice of *ribāṭ* was one of the most widespread in Islam, particularly in Ifrīqiyyā, as the testimony of al-Mālikī, a jurist from Qayrawān, suggests. The latter recounts, in a work of a biographical nature entitled *Riyāḍ al-nufūs*, the words of Saḥnūn, the founder of Malikism in the Maghrib, regarding the act of *ribāṭ* just performed by him, together with his companions, in the month of *ramaḍān*, in the Qaṣr of Monastir.<sup>35</sup> In

<sup>28</sup> See Umberto Rizzitano, “La cultura araba normanna e sveva,” in Rosario Romeo, ed., *Storia della Sicilia*, IV (Palermo, 1980), pp. 88–89, and in this regard the study by Francesco Barone, “Islam in Sicilia nel XII e XIII secolo: ortoprassi, scienze religiose e *taṣawwuf*,” *Incontri mediterranei. Rivista semestrale di storia e cultura* 6/2 (2003), 104–115.

<sup>29</sup> See *BAS* ar., 1: 119 and *BAS* it., 1: 158–159.

<sup>30</sup> See Iḥsān ʿAbbās, *Muʿjam al-ʿulamāʾ waʿl-shuʿarāʾ al-Ṣiqillyiyyīn* [Dictionary of Sicilian Learned Men and Poets] (Beirut, 1994), p. 18.

<sup>31</sup> Ed. Aḥmad Farīd al-Mazidī (Beirut, 2000).

<sup>32</sup> Ibn Jubayr, *Viaggio in Spagna, Sicilia, Siria e Palestina, Mesopotamia, Arabia, Egitto*, transl. Celestino Schiaparelli (second edn. Palermo, 1995), p. 230 and Ibn Jubayr, *BAS* it., 1: p. 125.

<sup>33</sup> See Maurici, *Castelli medievali della Sicilia*, p. 140.

<sup>34</sup> See *BAS* ar., 1: 15; *BAS* it., 1: 19.

<sup>35</sup> See Christophe Picard, “La mer et le sacré en Islam médiéval,” *Revue des Mondes Musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, 130 (2011), p. 14.

actual fact the practice of *ribāṭ* seems to have been encouraged and institutionalised by the Omayyad caliphs first of all, and by the Abbasid caliphs. It was in 796 that the latter ordered the governors on the frontier to build the first *ribāṭ*, amongst them the abovementioned Qaṣr of Monastir.<sup>36</sup> Such sites were institutionalised as pious foundations (*waqf* or *ḥabūs*),<sup>37</sup> and at the same time were frequented by devout men, so that they have been considered to be the first centres of ascetic practice in relationship with the sea. Only by crossing the Mediterranean was it possible, in Ifrīqiya, to win new ground for Islam and to establish there new contexts of sacrality. It was in fact the peculiar characteristics of the sea, at once positive but, above all, negative, that enabled the believer to sublimate his own acts, by placing him before a physical element that was alien and threatening. And it was always the sheer vastness of the sea, its unbounded nature and its plenitude, that served to engender the force of contemplation which rendered the *ribāṭ* the favoured sites of the future Sufi confraternities and spaces offering a privileged relationship between sacrality and the sea. One should likewise bear in mind that the geographer and traveller al-Ḥimyarī also devotes a page to the Qaṣr Sa’d, and in his *Kitāb ar-rawḍ al-Mi’tār fī khabar al-aqtār* (*The Book of the Scented Garden with News of Other Lands*),<sup>38</sup> written in the 13th–14th century, speaks of it as “a place of grace and benediction.”<sup>39</sup> Yet the most interesting information, probably drawn from other sources, which al-Ḥimyarī furnishes regarding this place, allowing us to venture a comparison between the religious practices enacted in the Qaṣr Sa’d with the act of *ribāṭ* performed by Saḥnūn and his companions in the Qaṣr of Monastir, concerns the fact that an *imām* there “performs with the inhabitants of the Castle the obligatory prayers along with the supplementary ones in the month of *ramaḍān*.”<sup>40</sup>

<sup>36</sup> See Id. and A. Borrut, “Rābaṭa, Ribāṭ, Rābiṭa: une institution à reconsidérer,” in *Chrétien et Musulmans en Méditerranée médiévale (VIII<sup>e</sup>–XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle)* (Poitiers, 2003), pp. 33–65.

<sup>37</sup> See Randi Deguilhem, “The Waqf in the City,” in Salma Khadra Jayyusi *et al.*, eds., *The City in the Islamic World* (Leiden, 2008), 2, pp. 923–950.

<sup>38</sup> For the publication of the information relating to Italy: Umberto Rizzitano, “L’Italia nel *Kitāb Rawḍ al-Mi’tār fī khabar al-aqtār* di Ibn ‘Abd al-Mun’im al-Ḥimyarī,” *Bulletin of the Faculty of Arts, Cairo University* XVIII/I (1956), 129–182 and 9–18 for the preamble in Italian. The complete edition, published in Beirut in 1975, was brought out by Iḥsān ‘Abbās.

<sup>39</sup> *La descrizione dell’Italia nel Rawḍ al-Mi’tār di al-Ḥimyarī*, trad. it. Adalgisa De Simone (Mazara del Vallo, 1984), pp. 67–68.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

## RELIGIOUS PRAXIS AND THE RELIGIOUS SCIENCES

The sources suggest that the religious life of the Muslims in Palermo was fairly well organised. Indeed, the city, at any rate so far as the literary imaginary was concerned, assumes the guise of the most important and the richest centre on the island, surrounded by imposing walls and therefore more readily defended, very fertile and economically and culturally active,<sup>41</sup> well placed, in short, to make the best possible contribution to the process of Islamisation and Arabisation.<sup>42</sup>

Aside from the abovementioned *ribāt*, the other Islamic places of worship were the mosques. The most famous ones in the capital seem to have been the Friday mosques located in the Cassaro and in the Kalsa, but lesser mosques<sup>43</sup> situated in a range of other quarters are also attested. Indeed, a specific quarter of Palermo, that of Ibn Saqlāb,<sup>44</sup> was actually named after a mosque. As elsewhere in the Muslim world, so too in Palermo, instruction in the religious sciences took place in the *kuttāb* and in the *madāris* attached to the mosques. In these latter, as Ibn Jubayr in fact recounts, schoolteachers were also trained. Their instruction involved, in the main, three traditional disciplines, that is, the *fiqh* or science of law, the *ḥadīth*, that is, the study of the sayings and deeds of the prophet Muḥammad, and the Koranic *qirāʾāt* regarding the variants in the reading of the sacred text of Islam. Once Sunnism had become established across the whole of the Maghrib, the juridical school followed in Sicily was the Malikite,<sup>45</sup> although the ḥanafite school had proselytes in the Islamic West, thanks

<sup>41</sup> See Annliese Nef, "Les élites savantes urbaines dans la Sicile islamique d'après les dictionnaires biographiques arabes," *MEFRM* 116/1 (2004), 451–70.

<sup>42</sup> As regards the important role of the cities in the processes of Arabisation and Islamisation in the Maghrib, see Bernard Rosenberger, "Les villes et l'arabisation. Fonctions des centres urbains du Magrib al-Aqsa (VIII<sup>e</sup>–XV<sup>e</sup> s.)," in Jorge Aguadé, Patrice Cressier and Ángeles Vicente, eds., *Peuplement et arabisation au Maghrib Occidental. Dialectologie et histoire* (Madrid and Zaragoza, 1998), pp. 39–52. See also Adalgisa De Simone, "I luoghi della cultura arabo-islamica," in Giosuè Musca, ed., *Centri di produzione della cultura nel Mezzogiorno normanno-svevo. Atti delle dodicesime giornate normanno-sveve* (Bari, 1997), pp. 55–87.

<sup>43</sup> See De Simone, *La descrizione dell'Italia*, p. 144.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.

<sup>45</sup> Umberto Rizzitano, *Storia e cultura nella Sicilia saracena*, *op. cit.*, pp. 207–215; William Granara, "Islamic Education and the Transmission of Knowledge in Muslim Sicily," in Joseph E. Lowry, Devin J. Stewart and Shawkat M. Toorawa, eds., *Law and Education in Medieval Islam. Studies in memory of Professor George Makdisi* (Chippenham, 2004), pp. 150–73; 'Abd al-Wahhāb, *Waraqāt 'an al-ḥadāra al-'arabiyya*; Mohamed Talbi, "al-Bi'a allāti ansha'at al-Saḥnūn: 'ālim al-Qayrawān," in *Id.*, *Etudes d'histoire ifriqienne et de civilisation musulmane médiévale* (Tunis, 1982), pp. 91–164.

in part to learned men, originally from Qayrawān, who taught in Palermo. The mosque of Sidī ‘Uqba, which was indeed in Qayrawān, played a fundamental part in the promotion of the ḥanafite school.<sup>46</sup> The triumph of Malikism in North Africa was due, in particular, to Saḥnūn b. Sa‘īd (777–855), whose work, entitled *Mudawwana*, met with more success than did the work entitled *Muwatta’*, by the actual head of the Malikite school. The *Mudawwana* was studied at Qayrawān by a great number of students coming from every corner of the Islamic world, and they in their turn publicised it in their respective countries.<sup>47</sup> The *fuqahā’*, precisely on account of their direct engagement with the problems of the community, played an important role in mediating between “high” and “low,” between court and city square, not only as regards the transmission of knowledge, but also in terms of their function as repositories of the juridico-religious tradition. Although the prosopographic sources have only left us a few details regarding a small number of learned men, it is worth recalling the activities in Sicily of a pupil of Asad b. al-Furāt, that is, Abū Yahyà Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Qādim (died 861), and a pupil of Saḥnūn, ‘Abd Allāh b. Ḥamdūn. Furthermore, we owe to Abū Rabī’ Sulaymān b. Sālīm al-Kindī al-Qaṭṭān, better known as Ibn al-Kaḥḥāla, involved from 894 to 901–902 in the administration of justice under the Aghlabids, a Malikite *fiqh* treatise entitled *Sulaymāniyya*. Scholars from Qayrawān who settled in Sicily included in their ranks al-Barādhī‘ī, the author of numerous works, amongst them an abridgement of the *Mudawwana*, the *Kitāb al-tahdhīb*, and an introduction of sorts to the themes addressed by Saḥnūn, entitled *Kitāb al-tambid li-masā’il al-Mudawwana*, which in its turn was abridged, as often occurred in this period, by Ibn Mufarraǰ al-Ṣiqillī. Another work by al-Barādhī‘ī, the *Kitāb al-sharḥ wa’l-tamāmāt li-masā’il al-Mudawwana*, was likewise abridged, but also refuted.<sup>48</sup> In 11th-century Palermo there would seem to have flourished a school of readers of the Koran which included among its representatives ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad al-Muqri’ al-Siqillī, who had also had as teachers two personages whose *nisba*,

<sup>46</sup> Ḥusayn Mu’nis, “Le Malékisme et l’échec des Fatimides en Ifriqiya,” in *Etudes Lévi-Provençal* (Paris, 1962), 1, pp. 197–220.

<sup>47</sup> Norman Calder, *Studies in Early Islamic Jurisprudence* (Oxford, 1993); Maria Amalia De Luca, *Giudici e giuristi nella Sicilia musulmana* (Palermo, 1981).

<sup>48</sup> The refutation was due to another Sicilian, Ibn al-Ḥakkār, who died between 1106 and 1155. See Rizzitano, *Storia e cultura*, pp. 211–12 and Christopher Melchert, *The Formation of the Sunni Schools of Law, 9th–10th Centuries C.E.* (Leiden-New York-Köln, 1997), pp. 39–40, above all for the ideological and social implications which led the Maghribian *fuqahā’* to accentuate the Maliki character of Hijazi jurisprudence.



al-Madīnī, does in fact refer to the capital of the Island.<sup>49</sup> Finally, it is important to recall that, once again in the 11th century, though in Mazara, and therefore beyond the geographical bounds set to the present volume, there flourished a famous school of *fiqh*, whose greatest representative was the *imām* al-Māzārī.<sup>50</sup>

#### CULTURAL PRODUCTION IN ARABIC AND THE PRINCIPLE OF IMITATION

Arabic cultural production in East and West was dominated in the period with which we are concerned by what I would define, in general terms, as the theoretical and practical principle of “emulation.” This same principle nurtured the debates and reflections of a historical, linguistic, philological and literary character regarding the importance of the past and the manner in which it was to be interpreted and recovered, the definition of literary genres and canons, and the importance of ethical and political conduct. Precisely because of the above-mentioned principle, the Arabic literary imaginary would seem to have been dominated by emulation of models (the sacred text of Islam and pre-Islamic poetry), whereby each genre had precise historical or ideal antecedents to imitate and transcend. Every form of “originality” tended to become fixed as norm or canon, in a dialectic resolving itself as a process of innovation to be realised within the tradition. This approach to the structuring of knowledge was also found in Sicily. We have already encountered this phenomenon in, for example, the context of the *fiqh*, or law, in which scholars undertake the drafting of abridgements and commentaries upon earlier works, considered to be foundational, or in the refutation of texts (or parts of them) which deserve to be emended, and always in relation to the models or the norm.

#### LINGUISTIC AND GRAMMATICAL STUDIES

The same consideration applies to grammatical, linguistic and literary studies, widely practised in Sicily and in its capital, and in general charac-

<sup>49</sup> See Nef, “Les élites savantes urbaines,” p. 460 and n. 29.

<sup>50</sup> See Ḥasan Ḥusnī ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, *al-Imām al-Māzārī* (Tunis, 1955); Andrea Borruso, *al-Imām al-Māzārī. Un mazarese del medioevo arabo-islamico* (Mazara del Vallo, 1983); Abdel Majid Turki, “Consultation juridique d’al-Imām al-Māzārī sur le cas des musulmans vivant en Sicile sous l’autorité des Normands,” *Mélanges de l’Université Saint-Joseph* L (1984), 689–704.

terised by a progressive unification according to a norm which was in the making. Relations between masters and pupils were of overriding importance here. One of the most prominent personalities in the field of linguistic and grammatical studies was Ibn al-Birr, who ran a school first in Mazara and then in Palermo, where he remained until 1068. Amongst his pupils one should mention the compiler of the most important anthology of Arabic poetry from Sicily, which has come down to us only in the form of abridgements by other authors, namely, Ibn al-Qaṭṭā' al-Ṣiqillī and the linguist Ibn Makkī (1107), the author of the only work of *laḥn al-ʿamma* of the Islamic West concerning Sicily.

The activities of Ibn al Birr, who emigrated to Egypt after the advent of the Normans, included transmitting to the already mentioned Ibn al-Qaṭṭā' an important lexicographical dictionary, the *Ṣiḥāh* of Jawhārī, and the bringing to Sicily of the divan of al-Mutanabbī, a famous Abbasid poet who died in 965 and who exerted a wide influence upon the production of the Arabic versifiers of the Island. We know, moreover, that he devoted himself to the revision of the work entitled *Tathqīf al-lisān wa talqīh al-janān* (*Correction of the language and fertilisation of the soul*), written by his pupil Ibn Makkī al-Ṣiqillī.<sup>51</sup> The aim of Ibn Makkī, whose work belongs in the context of a more comprehensive process designed to conserve and preserve the classical Arabic language, was to record the "errors" or deviations from the norm perpetrated by Sicilians, in speech and in writing. This work, to be handled with extreme caution by anyone seeking to reconstruct the history of Arabic in the Maghribian context, does nonetheless present features of great interest from a sociolinguistic point of view and has, not by chance, recently been reassessed by scholars interested in Middle Arabic, this latter being understood to be "a language used in numerous texts, mixed in nature, linguistically and therefore stylistically, in that it combines features of the standard language, dialectal elements and characteristics of a third type, neither standard nor dialectal, which are peculiar to it."<sup>52</sup> It transmits to us, on the one hand, the deviations ascribable to various professional categories such as, for example, readers of the Koran, specialists of *ḥadīth*, the *fuqahā'* or legal experts, doctors, administrative secretaries, poets, and, on the other hand, the "errors" (*aghālīt*) committed in speech (*sami'tuhā min an-nās*, "what I have heard the people say"). The horizon of expectation, which refers to

<sup>51</sup> Rizzitano, *Storia e cultura*, p. 158.

<sup>52</sup> See Lentin, "Sur quelques spécificités," p. 46.

the elitist character that linguistic studies and researches have had in the classification of knowledge in medieval Islam, is however probably to be identified in the *khāṣṣa*, as Annliese Nef rightly observes.<sup>53</sup> The *Tathqīf al-lisān* must have enjoyed a modest circulation in the medieval West, and have attracted the attention of other scholars who shared with Ibn Makkī and with other “purists” the same conservative preoccupations, which do however reveal the importance of the process of Arabisation and the unmistakable presence, in Sicily as elsewhere, of regional linguistic variants (also reflected in the language of archival documents from the Norman period).<sup>54</sup> Proof of this point is supplied by the work of the Andalusian grammarian Ibn Hishām al-Lakhmī (died 1181–82), entitled *Madkhal ilā taqwīm al-lisān wa ta’līm al-bayān* (*Introduction to the correction of language and the teaching of eloquence*), the second chapter of which is devoted to the refutation of sixty-two points made in the text by Ibn Makkī.<sup>55</sup>

#### VERSE PRODUCTION: PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

The men of letters active in Palermo sometimes confer specific local characteristics upon their works but when that occurs, as for instance in nostalgic poems or in those written in praise of emirs, *gaiti* and sovereigns or, again, in some *adab* prose, they employ stylemes, images, expressions and ciphers reflecting particular cultural perspectives. They represent, or perhaps it would be better to say they “reproduce,” in images, the symbols of the culture to which they belong and the collective materials carefully elaborated by previous generations of poets. The scope of such a phenomenon is so broad and so characteristic that it is permissible to identify in the Arabic culture of the centuries under examination here a tendency to “auto-communication,” to adopt one of Lotman’s terms. This culture does not merely not shun stereotypes, but tends rather to consider

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<sup>53</sup> “L’insistance de l’auteur sur le nombre d’“erreurs” de la *khāṣṣa* nous semble être un élément rhétorique annonçant l’objet du traité et la responsabilité dans l’évolution linguistique d’un groupe dont le nom même souligne la maîtrise de la langue,” Annliese Nef, “Analyse du *Tathqīf al-Lisān* d’Ibn Makkī et intérêt pour la connaissance de la variante sicilienne de l’arabe : problèmes méthodologiques,” *Oriente Moderno* n.s. XVI (1997), 1–17, p. 9.

<sup>54</sup> See Metcalfe, *Muslims and Christians in Norman Italy*.

<sup>55</sup> See Cassarino, “Una confutazione linguistica.”

them to be things of intrinsic value, and to turn them into “stable” and “eternal” elements which confer an “aulic” status upon texts.

The above considerations are, for various reasons, fundamental. First of all, they allow us to revise the negative aesthetic judgement often voiced by those scholars who have studied the Arabic poetry of Sicily, and who, disappointed by the paucity of references to the Island, have often dismissed it as repetitive and stereotyped it in negative terms. Moreover, these same considerations enable us to grasp the intrinsic significance of Sicilian production in Arabic, by relating it to Maghribian-Andalusian production. In this latter context, the texts, and not the authors, occupy a central position. If, indeed, we refer to the particular aspect of the “voice” with which the Arabic poems from the centuries prior to those with which we are concerned here speak, we come to realise how their transmission, long entrusted to orality,<sup>56</sup> has often entailed a distinction between poets (sing. *shā'ir*; pl. *shu'arā'*) and singers/transmitters (sing. *rāwī*; pl. *ruwāt*). Texts of this kind, in some cases recited to the accompaniment of a musical instrument, have long retained traces of their origin: the existence of different versions of the same verses; the presence of a markedly allusive language; the quotation of others' verses, often undeclared, because permitted, wished for and codified by the literary critics; the presence of a formulary style.<sup>57</sup> Finally, such considerations are also significant in regard to the peculiar conception of originality that is the hallmark of Arabic literary production, and not only of the poetry: an author harks back continually to his precursors, and strives to emulate them. He may recount his own personal experiences but he must, on the one hand, rely upon models which are already codified and characteristic of specific poetic genres and, on the other hand, apply all his wisdom and skill to the task of transmitting to the receivers, with renewed images, the ethic and aesthetic ideals to which he seeks to give voice so that they become participants in a shared heritage of values and experiences.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> On the dialectical relationship between orality and writing, see Walter G. Ong, *Interfaces of the Word. Studies in the Evolution of Consciousness and Culture* (Ithaca-London, 1977); Albert Arazi, “De la voix au calame et la naissance du classicisme en poésie,” *Arabica* 44 (1997), 377–406; Abdelfattah Kilito, “Oralità e scrittura: la modalità araba,” in *Lo spazio letterario del medioevo*, pp. 233–258; Julia Bray, “Verbs and Voices,” in Robert G. Hoyland and Philip F. Kennedy, eds., *Islamic Reflections, Arabic Musings. Studies in Honour of Professor Alan Jones* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 170–85.

<sup>57</sup> I shall simply refer here to the classic essay by Abdelfattah Kilito, *L'auteur et ses doubles* (Paris 1984).

<sup>58</sup> See, amongst other things, the contributions relating to literary questions by Katia Zakharia included in Thierry Bianquis, Pierre Guichard and Mathieu Tillier, eds.,

Where the Arabic poetry of Sicily is concerned, the passage from oral transmission to writing-reading is an established fact: the texts have been consigned to manuscript anthologies. The most famous is indubitably the collection of the above-mentioned Ibn al-Qaṭṭā' al-Ṣiqillī (died 1121), entitled *al-Durra al-khaṭīra min shu'arā' al-jazīra* (*The Precious pearl of the poets of the island*),<sup>59</sup> which has only reached us in a fragmentary state through later authors, amongst them Ibn al-Ṣayrafī (died 1147), man of letters and functionary active in the Fatimid court of Egypt,<sup>60</sup> Ibn Aghlab, an anthologist who in an indirect fashion produced an abridgement of it,<sup>61</sup> al-İṣfahānī (died 1201), who dedicated a chapter of his *Kharīdat al-Qaṣr*<sup>62</sup> to the Arabo-Sicilian poets. To Ibn al-Qaṭṭā' we also owe a commentary, predominantly grammatical and lexical, on forty-two hemistichs by the famous poet al-Mutanabbī (died 965), perhaps sketched out and begun in Palermo and then completed in Egypt,<sup>63</sup> some short essays on Arabic metrics, and a work entitled *The Book of verbs*, which, though it contains some interesting and original insights and met with notable success, has the form of a modified version of *The Book of verbs* by the Andalusian Ibn Quṭīyya (died 977).<sup>64</sup> It should be borne in mind that "the tendency to compose verses, even extemporaneously, has always been very widespread among the Arabs, so that in every social category, from the emir to the court functionary, from the merchant to the soldier, from the minister to the clerk or to the pious imam, we find 'poets,' a term which should be understood to mean rhymers and versifiers, albeit possessed of a high degree of skill."<sup>65</sup> It was, however, the poetic tradition of the past, from

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*Les débuts du monde musulman (VII<sup>e</sup>-X<sup>e</sup> siècle). De Muhammad aux dynasties autonomes* (Paris, 2012).

<sup>59</sup> Ed. Bashīr al-Bakkūsh (Beirut, 1995).

<sup>60</sup> See Ignazio Di Matteo, "Antologia di poeti arabi siciliani estratta da quella di Ibn al-Qaṭṭā'," *Archivio Storico Siciliano* 1 (1935), 93-133 and Francesco Gabrieli, "L'antologia di Ibn as-Sayrafī sui poeti arabo-siciliani," *Bollettino del Centro di Studi Filologici e Linguistici Siciliani* 2 (1954), 39-51.

<sup>61</sup> See Umberto Rizzitano, "Un compendio dell'antologia di poeti arabo-siciliani intitolata *ad-durrah al-khaṭīra min shu'arā' al-jazīra* di Ibn al-Qaṭṭā' 'il siciliano' (433-515 Eg.): edizione del testo e traduzione di alcuni frammenti," *Memorie della Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei*, serie VIII, 8/5 (1958), 335-78.

<sup>62</sup> Ed. Muḥammad al-Marzūqī (Tunis, 1966).

<sup>63</sup> See Umberto Rizzitano, "Un commento di Ibn al-Qaṭṭā' 'il siciliano' ad alcuni versi di al-Mutanabbī," *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 30 (1955), 207-27.

<sup>64</sup> See Eugenio Griffini, "Intorno al 'Kitāb al-af'āl' o 'Libro dei verbi'," in Enrico Besta *et al*, eds., *Scritti per il Centenario della nascita di Michele Amari* (Palermo, reed. 1990), 1, pp. 431-44.

<sup>65</sup> Andrea Borruso, "La poesia araba in Sicilia nel Medioevo," in *Testimonianze degli Arabi in Italia* (Rome, 1988), pp. 35-56.

time to time duly absorbed and transformed, which may also be said to have written the Arabic poetry of Sicily.

Being obliged to limit ourselves to what was composed in Palermo by versifiers who came to the city and then stayed, who were born there and emigrated from there or else who remained but a short time, and therefore excluding from our panorama the more famous Ibn Ḥamdīs of Noto and al-Billanūbī of Villanuova di Sicilia, whose songbooks have survived intact,<sup>66</sup> we shall focus in the main on two specific genres, which were employed there uninterruptedly throughout first the Islamic and then the Norman domination: praise poetry and the poetry of nostalgia. The models are those supplied by classical poetry, which was quantitative, astrophic and monorhythmic, but these same models are modified in certain cases according to the evolutionary process inaugurated by the “modern” poets, which results in the dissolution or fragmentation of themes and motifs, at first combined in one and the same song, into different, autonomous compositions.

#### PRAISE POETRIES

One genre through which we are able to recognise the relationship of the Arabic poets with Palermo is the *madiḥ* or panegyric. It consists of the eulogy of a person, of a dynasty or even of a place (palace, city, country) and it is usually, even if not always, composed with a view to receiving a reward or in order to show gratitude or, again, to make a request. It is, then, a genre favoured, and fostered by the relationship between men of letters and power, that is, between poets and patrons. Great stress is laid on the latter's gifts of courage, rectitude, strength, generosity, through bold comparisons and images. We know, for example, that many poets coming from Ifrīqiya or native to Sicily had dedicated songs of praise to the emirs of the Kalbid dynasty,<sup>67</sup> and in particular to Thiḡat al-Dawla Yūsuf b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Kalbī, emir in Palermo from 989/90 to 998. Amongst them we should mention Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn b. al-Qarqūdi al-Kātib, Mushrif b. Rāshid, Hāshim b. Yūnus and ‘Alī b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūbī who, according to the judgement of the anthologist Ibn al-Qaṭṭā‘, was a “composer of (literary) jewels”<sup>68</sup> and also wrote a *qaṣīda* in honour of the Zirid prince Mu‘izz b.

<sup>66</sup> *Dīwān Ibn Ḥamdīs*, ed. Iḥsān ‘Abbās (Beirut, 1969).

<sup>67</sup> See Ḍayf, *Ta’rīkh*, p. 372.

<sup>68</sup> See *BAS*, ar., 2: 715; *BAS*, it., 3: 769.

Bādīs (emir from 1016 to 1062).<sup>69</sup> Another important panegyrist active in Palermo, indeed the “official poet”<sup>70</sup> of Yūsuf Thiḡat ad-Dawla and of his successors, amongst them his son Ja‘far, in power from 998 to 1019, was Ibn al-Khayyāt.<sup>71</sup> This was the same poet who celebrated, amongst others, the al-Akḡal emirs, in power from 1019 to 1038, and Samsām ad-Dawla,<sup>72</sup> and who, after the fall of the Kalbids, which took place in 1052, even sang the praises in verse of Ibn al-Thumna, the *qā'id* or leader famous for having been the “betrayed” of Islamic Sicily, having turned to Robert Guiscard, and thus paved the way for the Norman conquest. In his critical judgement of this poet Ibn al-Qaṭṭā' was fulsome in his appreciation: his powers of description and observation were actually likened to those of Jarīr, a celebrated poet from the Omayyad period.

Amongst the other noted panegyrists of Muslim Sicily we should mention Abū 'Abd Allāh Ḥusayn b. Abī 'Alā, who sang in verse of the incursions of al-Akḡal in Apulia and in Calabria.<sup>73</sup> The advent of the Normans, following on from the phase of domestic strife among Muslims, which is reflected in the verses of Abū Muḡammad al-Qāsim al-Tamīmī, did not put a stop to the production in Palermo of encomiastic poetry in Arabic. Indeed, we have various examples of praise songs addressed to the new masters of the Island upon which the censure of later anthologists has sometimes fallen. Some of these poems are of genuine interest if considered in the context of the recasting of the relationships between literature and power in Norman Palermo. In actual fact, the poets would regularly address encomiastic verses to the sovereigns because they suffered harassment at their hands or had been taken prisoner. For example, to Abū Ḥafṣ 'Umar b. Ḥasan al-Naḡwī we owe a song in praise of Roger II, composed after being taken prisoner, with a view to obtaining the freedom that was however then denied him.<sup>74</sup> A similar plea to be allowed to re-enter the country was associated with another panegyric, that of 'Abd ar-Raḡmān b. Ramaḡān al-Malaṭī, who desired to make his way back to Madīnat Malta, his place of origin. Some poets addressed songs to Roger II, launching into laudatory accounts of his palaces, whose scale, magnificence and beauty represented the sovereign's supreme power. Singing of

<sup>69</sup> See Ḍayf, *Ta'riḡh*, p. 373.

<sup>70</sup> See Andrea Borruso, “La poesia araba in Sicilia nel Medioevo,” in Id., *Arabeschi* (Milan, 2002), p. 96.

<sup>71</sup> See 'Abbas, *Mu'jam*, pp. 128–47.

<sup>72</sup> See Ḍayf, *Ta'riḡh*, p. 376.

<sup>73</sup> See Di Matteo, “Antologia di poeti arabi siciliani,” pp. 106–107.

<sup>74</sup> See Ḍayf, *Ta'riḡh*, p. 374.

the palace amounted to singing of the might of the prince. ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad al-Buṭīri dedicated his verses to the Qubba and to the Maṣūriyya, pointing out in such places a beauty, abundance of water and verdancy worthy of being compared to paradisaical sites and bringing joy to the soul. It is well known, indeed, that gardens are a reflection of Paradise, a place of rest and harmony, an object of contemplation and, at the same time, a building block of nature in the poetic imaginary.<sup>75</sup> The garden was an artificial place, built on a royal design, which took on the shape of a physical and mental space of relationship between man and nature. It also had the function of making manifest the prestige of the one who possessed it, above all if contrasted with the physical conditions of the arid and desert places ever present in the poetic imaginary of the Arabs. ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān of Trapani dedicated some verses, which ultimately became famous, to the Favara “with the double lake.” The descriptive technique employed was a tried and tested one, and it was designed to stimulate the senses, sight and hearing in particular. It relied upon constant allusion to colours: the superb “oranges” of the island resembled “blazing fire on branches of emerald.” The yellow of the lemons was like “the pallor of a lover” who had spent a sleepless night far from the beloved; the limpidity of a spring is compared in its luminosity and whiteness to “liquid pearls;” an expanse of water is likened to a sea in which the blue of the sky is reflected. The vista is thus “sweet and a wondrous spectacle,” as we read in the first hemistich. The involvement of the hearing and the sense of harmony are also achieved through the allusion to movement (the nine rills of water with rippling currents running across them, the large fish that swim through the limpid “waves” of the park) and the chirruping of the birds inside the orchards. The whole ensemble evokes, on the one hand, the idea of ostentatious display (“splendid lake with two palms,” “sovereign dwelling ringed by a lake”) and, on the other hand, that of sensual pleasure (here “love pitches its tent”). The image of the two palms, subjected to a process of outright personification, is particularly effective in this regard. Just as, even in the pre-Islamic period, the poets invoked the copious fall of rain on the beloved’s abode, presenting it as a symbol of benediction, so too ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān of Trapani invokes the raindrops falling on the two palms of the Favara (“may the continuous fall of the

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<sup>75</sup> Silvio Marconi, *Il giardino-paradiso. L’influsso iranico negli orti-giardino e in altri ambiti materiali e immateriali della Sicilia islamica* (Rome, 2000) and Eliana Creazzo, “*En Sesile est un mons mout grans.*” *La Sicilia medievale fra storia e immaginario letterario (XI–XIII sec.)* (Soveria Mannelli, 2006), pp. 98–99.



rain leave you in a state of intoxication," the poet writes), resembling, for their part, two lovers who, in their turn, offer shelter to couples resorting to "their sheltering shade."<sup>76</sup>

A different sort of inspiration and intention, though still a variant on the theme of the relationships between men of letters and power, informs the texts composed by the Egyptian poet Ibn Qalāqīs (died 1172). To this poet who passed through Norman Sicily, for reasons that are none too clear, in May 1168, and whose stay in Palermo<sup>77</sup> itself is a matter of record, are owed panegyrics both in honour of various Arabo-Sicilian personages<sup>78</sup> and to one of the two Williams.<sup>79</sup>

To Abū' l-Qāsim b. Ḥammūd, known as Ibn al-Ḥajar, in particular, Ibn Qalāqīs dedicated a work entitled *al-Zahr al-bāsim wa'l-'arf al-nāsim fi madīḥ al-ajall Abū' l-Qāsim* (*The Laughing flower and the fragrant Zephyr in praise of the Most Illustrious Abū' l-Qāsim*).<sup>80</sup> It is in the form of a "hybrid document,"<sup>81</sup> in assonantal prose and in verse, and is predominantly autobiographical in character, and within it we find quoted, alongside interesting epistolary exchanges with some prominent personalities on the island, to which we shall have occasion to return in the section dedicated to the *adab*, various songs in praise of the *gaito* and of other personages from the Banū al-Ḥajar. Abū' l-Qāsim b. Ḥammūd, notwithstanding the fact that he was probably disliked by the Normans, perhaps on account of the power he exercised over the Islamic communities on the island, held a prestigious post within their administration,<sup>82</sup> as is evident

<sup>76</sup> For the Arabic text, see *BAS* ar., 2: 708–710. The Italian translation from which the English translation in this article has been made is by Francesco Gabrieli. See Gabrieli-Scerrato, p.738.

<sup>77</sup> See Adalgisa De Simone, "Ibn Qalāqīs in Sicilia," in Bianca Scarcia Amoretti and Lucia Rostagno, eds., *Yād Nāma, in memoria di A. Bausani* (Rome, 1999), pp. 323–44: p. 326.

<sup>78</sup> One of them, by way of example, is al-Qāsim b. Khālī'. See *Dīwān Ibn Qalāqīs*, ed. Siham al-Furayḥ (Kuwayt 1988), 2, pp. 8–9. The panegyric of William is to be found at pp. 145–47.

<sup>79</sup> See Annliese Nef, "Un poème d'Ibn Qalāqīs à la gloire de Guillaume II," in Benoît Grévin, Annliese Nef and Emmanuelle Tixier, eds., *Chrétien, juifs et musulmans dans la Méditerranée médiévale: études en hommage à Henri Bresc* (Paris, 2008), pp. 33–43. At the time of the Egyptian poet's journey in Sicily, William II was a minor and a ward of court and his mother was the regent.

<sup>80</sup> Ed. 'Abd al-'Aziz b. Nāṣir al-Mānī', Riyāḍ, 1984; Ital. trans. Adalgisa De Simone, *Splendori e misteri di Sicilia* (Soveria Mannelli, 1996).

<sup>81</sup> This phrase is taken from De Simone, *Splendori*, p. 10.

<sup>82</sup> On the functioning of the Norman administration in Sicily, see, apart from the classic study by Jeremy Johns, *Arabic Administration in Norman Sicily* (Cambridge, 2002), Hiroshi Takayama, "L'organizzazione amministrativa nel regno normanno," in Enrico Cuzzo, ed., *Studi in onore di Salvatore Tramontana* (Pratola Serra, 2003), pp. 415–29.

from various historical sources and archival documents. His name crops up, for example, both in the contracts of the notary Giovanni Scriba, where he features in the guise of principal of three agents in Genoa for commercial reasons,<sup>83</sup> and in a deed of donation in Greek,<sup>84</sup> in his role as Archon of the Council in the administration of the Kingdom. Even today we do not know the reasons why relations between Ibn Qalāqis and the head of the Muslims on the island had at a certain point soured. The fact remains that relations amongst the Muslims, and between the Muslims and the Normans, must have been somewhat complex, even during the Regency of Marguerite of Navarre.<sup>85</sup> Indeed, it seems that Ibn al-Ḥajar, by means of a missive entrusted to al-Ḥarawī, who was passing through Palermo tried to transmit to Saladin an invitation to reconquer Sicily. One can thus understand, from the above, how Ibn al-Ḥajar should have been the recipient of some encomiastic songs and the dedicatee of writings by Ibn Qalāqis and other men of letters visiting the Island. The poet, in the *incipit* to the *Zahr*, evokes a “gallant lord,” who is noble and elegant, and who occupies a central place in his work.<sup>86</sup>

Praise is heaped by Ibn Qalāqis upon Abū 'l-Qāsim's expressive capacities and his gift for drafting documents (“with his eloquence he is capable of outdoing Quṣṣ Sa'īda,” the poet writes, likening his patron to a figure from Arab antiquity whose oratorical prowess was legendary),<sup>87</sup> upon his noble origins (“you are descended from the Quraysh, who are glorious mountains whilst the others are but stones”),<sup>88</sup> his generosity and magnanimity. Praise, gifts and hospitality are subjected by Ibn Qalāqis to a process of personification designed to render the encomium still more effective and to fashion striking images:

Praise has sworn to address none but Abū 'l-Qāsim b. Ḥammūd  
 In his hands gifts vie with one another and with them the generous man  
 chases away avarice  
 The fire of hospitality is always lit by him, as the wretched passer-by  
 Who is invited there knows full well.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>83</sup> See De Simone, *Splendori*, p. 15 and n. 20, and Johns, *Arabic Administration*, pp. 234–42.

<sup>84</sup> See Cusa, I, pp. 484–85.

<sup>85</sup> See Ugo Falcano, *Liber de Regno Siciliae*, ed. Giovan Battista Siragusa (Rome, 1897), p. 119; Ital. trans., *Il Libro del Regno di Sicilia* (Cuneo, 1931), p. 93.

<sup>86</sup> See De Simone, *Splendori*, p. 38.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 100, 115.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 47–48.

Yet the three sons of Abū' l-Qāsim, bearing the names of three of the rightly guided caliphs, were praised, and in each case for his particular and characteristic gifts.<sup>90</sup> An occasion for the composition of a *qaṣīda*, just to give another example, was provided by the birth of a son to Abū' l-Ḥasan b. Ḥammūd, the brother of Abū' l-Qāsim: "through him there is added to the noble Banū l-Ḥajar a gem, from which beautiful sources of light will pour forth."<sup>91</sup>

Ibn Qalāqīs did not only write panegyrics for the Muslim *qā'id*. The poem he composed in honour of the Hauteville sovereign, on account of the themes used in it and the images deployed, bears out both a general tendency, typical of Islamic tradition (but not exclusive to it), to accentuate the universal character of sovereignty,<sup>92</sup> and the marked ideological and political connotations of the milieu in which the poem was conceived, a milieu characterised by the coexistence of three distinct cultures, Latin, Greek and Arab.<sup>93</sup> The *incipit* inscribes the composition within an all too recognisable tradition: the sovereign is placed upon Solomon's throne and guided by the judgement of David. The first hemistich thus "opens" in the past and revives a formula well-known in the genre of *madiḥ* serving to create a link, an almost oxymoronic *iunctura*, with a glorious and mythical bygone time. Furthermore, William is defined as "King of the world," is said to dominate the universe and to be capable of changing the course of history. Note is made of his lofty lineage, his relationship to the religious sphere (he is a man of faith and rules with God's guidance), his generosity and his *pietas*. As Annliese Nef has observed: "Whereas the contemporary context was therefore favourable to this type of production, as much because of the close similarities between the celebratory themes in the different poetic traditions as because of the intense relations linking the schools of the Mediterranean basin (and beyond), the Sicilian milieu

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., pp. 52–58, 68–69.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>92</sup> See Jocelyne Dakhlia, "Les Miroirs des princes islamiques: une modernité sourde?", *Annales, Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 57e année/5 (2002), 1191–1206 ; Nef, "Un poème d'Ibn Qalāqīs," p. 43.

<sup>93</sup> On the co-existence of the three cultures in Norman Sicily I would refer the reader to the classic study, imbued with an insular patriotism, by Antonino De Stefano, *La cultura in Sicilia nel periodo normanno* (Bologna, 1956) and, above all, to Karla Mallette: "Translating Sicily," *The Kingdom of Sicily, 1100–1250, A Literary History* (Philadelphia, 2005) and "Poetries of the Norman Courts," in Maria Rosa Menocal, Raymond P. Scheindlin, Michael Sells, eds., *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature. The Literature of Al-Andalus*, (Cambridge 2012), pp. 377–87.

would seem to have lent itself particularly well to such practices, even if, [to establish this fact], we would need to extend our enquiry.”<sup>94</sup>

It is important, in this context, to recall how, on the opposite shores of the Mediterranean, following on from decisions taken in the Norman court with regard to attacks to be launched against Gabes and Mahdiyya, there were poets who were composing verses in honour of Muslim princes who were readying themselves to combat Roger’s armies with any means at their disposal. Consider, for example, the verses of Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh the Secretary in praise of ‘Ali b. Yaḥyà who in Sfax had defeated Roger’s army, which had come to the aid of the treacherous ruler of Gabes, Rāfi‘ b. Makkan b. Kāmil. Here we find fulsome praise of the valour of the Muslim prince, who “with a violent blow managed to extinguish a fire that threatened a general conflagration.”<sup>95</sup> Consider also the *qaṣīda* composed by Muḥammad b. Bashīr for Abū ‘l-Ḥasan ‘Alī, the son of Yaḥyà b. Tamīm (died 1116), who was readying himself for a war against Roger in Mahdiyya.<sup>96</sup>

“Ready your mighty ones against your enemies, for they will sweep over them, like a storm destroying all in its path,” the poet begins, later interweaving the motif of panegyric with that of vaunting the warrior virtues of the Muslim combatants. He has recourse, not by chance, to the image of the *ṣilāl*, that is, the poisonous snakes “sent from Gehenna, to burn the liver of the enemies (of God), indeed, actually to cook it.”<sup>97</sup> Some of the most famous compositions by Ibn Ḥamdīs are likewise centrally concerned with the *jihād* on land and on sea and the valour of the man who showed such courage when fighting the Rūm (“when you see these valiant men in their time of trial, you’d rather face a starving lion”)<sup>98</sup> and defeated them (as in the battle at Cape Dīmās in 1123).<sup>99</sup>

Arabic praise poetry in Palermo was not only dedicated to Muslim emirs or to Christian princes. Some compositions, which I would venture to define as “poetry in the guise of correspondence” or “epistolary verses,”

<sup>94</sup> See Nef, “Un poème d’Ibn Qalāqīs,” p. 43.

<sup>95</sup> See *BAS* ar., 2: 438–439; *BAS* it., 2: 492.

<sup>96</sup> See *BAS* ar., 2: 450; *BAS* it., 2: 501.

<sup>97</sup> See *BAS* ar., 2: 451; *BAS* it., 2: 501.

<sup>98</sup> See F. Gabrieli, *Gli Arabi in Italia*, p. 185.

<sup>99</sup> See, for example, Andrea Borruso, “La battaglia di capo Dīmās nei versi di Ibn Ḥamdīs, poeta arabo di Sicilia,” *Bollettino del Centro di Studi Filologici e Linguistici Siciliani* 13 (1997), 5–19. The *qaṣīda* relating to this battle may also be read in Italian in Ibn Ḥamdīs, *Il Canzoniere*, Ital. trans., Celestino Schiaparelli, ed. Stefania Elena Carnemolla (Palermo, 1998), pp. 237–41. On other skirmishes and battles, see, in this same volume, pp. 338, 340, 343.

precisely with reference to the contamination occurring between poetic language and the rhetoric of practical communication, reflect the complex and interesting links and relationships of esteem between men of letters, some of whom held important offices at the Norman court in Palermo. One emblematic case is that of Abū'l-Ḍaw', who, for reasons that remain unclear, never held the post of *wazīr* (minister), assigned to him after the death of 'Abd Allāh an-Naṣrānī, that is, Cristodulos, ultimately allotted to George of Antioch. The anthologist al-Iṣfāhānī considered Abū'l-Ḍaw', who at that date was *kātib al-inshā'*, that is, secretary at the Chancellery, to be a man of letters and poet of genuine sensibility. His verses were included in the *Kharīdat al-Qaṣr*, thanks to the encomium of Ibn Bashrūn, who lived in the second half of the 12th century, while the verses exalting his nobility and his poetic gifts bear the signature of a friend of his, Abū'l-Ṣalt (died 1134), a man of letters and expert in philosophy, astronomy, mathematics, music etc.<sup>100</sup> The latter, a native of Denia, was present in, amongst other places, Egypt, at the time of 'Alī b. Yaḥyà (1116–1121), and in the Norman court at Palermo, where he forged a close relationship of friendship and mutual esteem with the Sicilian man of letters. The praises offered by Abū'l-Ḍaw' centre on his friend's prowess with the pen, "with the nib that glides as if its aperture spread the characters on the page in great profusion,"<sup>101</sup> on his quick intelligence, knowledge, wisdom and magnanimity.<sup>102</sup>

In addition, further testimony of the relations of mutual esteem and friendship between Muslim men of culture in Norman Palermo is provided by the exchange of letters and encomiastic verses between Ibn Qalāqīs and the poet Abū'l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Abī'l-Fatḥ b. Khalaf al-Umawī, who served as an intermediary between his friend in Alexandria and the Banū'l-Ḥajar.<sup>103</sup> Ibn Qalāqīs wrote as follows regarding his friend's accomplishments and their mutual affection:

[So splendid are your] poems that to the heavens they seem to be shining  
stars  
Fit to adorn the darkest nights!  
Verses [so multi-coloured] that to the gardens they seem to be flowers  
Fit to be strewn as ornaments on the slopes!

<sup>100</sup> See Adalgisa De Simone, "Alla Corte di Ruggero II tra poesia e politica," in Ead., *Nella Sicilia "araba" tra storia e filologia* (Palermo, 1999), pp. 3–15.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> De Simone, *Splendori*, pp. 72–75.

Amongst the poets my heart yearns for tender love from you, wherever it goes.

I have chosen you in Sicily to be my companion, and that you may be a cultivated rose in a briar.<sup>104</sup>

To which al-Umawī replied:

O you who are the prince of poets, and amongst them the most sublime when you encounter them,

O you who are the most astute in answering, if a question is put to you, and the most eloquent . . .<sup>105</sup>

#### AL-ḤANĪN ILĀ' L-AWṬĀN, OR THE POETICS OF NOSTALGIA

The theme of *ḥanīn ilā' l-awṭān*, or nostalgia for one's birthplace, looms large in Arabic poetic production from the very beginning.<sup>106</sup> This is an intriguing theme which has attracted the attention of a number of scholars concerned with Arabic poetry in Sicily, and with that of Ibn Ḥamdīs in particular.<sup>107</sup> The verses of this poet, which are particularly striking, despite the fact that they were not conceived in Palermo, seem nonetheless to interpret and to transmit the common feeling of all those men of letters who, after the advent of the Normans, decided to emigrate, and from their places of exile yearned for their lost homeland:

Oh my Sicily. In memory  
A desperate longing for you and  
For the follies of my youth returns. Again I see  
The lost happinesses and the splendid friends,  
Oh Paradise from which I was expelled!

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>106</sup> The bibliography on this argument is extensive. I shall simply refer to: Albert Arazi, "al-Ḥanīn ilā' l-awṭān. Entre la *jāhiliyya* et l'Islam. Le Bédouin et le citadin reconciliés," in *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 143/2(1993), 287–327; Mirella Cassarino, "Cammelli nostalgici di terre lontane," in Giovanna Carbonaro, Mirella Cassarino, et al., eds., *Medioevo romanzo e orientale. Il viaggio nelle letterature romanze e orientali* (Soveria Mannelli, 2006), pp. 229–42; Alexander E. Elinson, *Looking Back at al-Andalus: the Poetics of Loss and Nostalgia in Medieval and Hebrew Literature* (Leiden, 2009). In addition, let me cite the English translation, edited by Patricia Crone and Shmuel Moreh, of the *Kitāb adab al-ghurabā'* attributed to Abu'l-Faraj al-Isfahānī, appearing under the title *The Book of Strangers. Medieval Arabic Graffiti on the Theme of Nostalgia* (Princeton, 2000).

<sup>107</sup> See Andrea Borruso, "La nostalgia della Sicilia nel 'dīwān' di Ibn Ḥamdīs", *Bollettino del Centro di Studi Filologici e Linguistici Siciliani* 12 (1973), 38–54; William Granara, "Ibn Ḥamdīs and the poetry of nostalgia," in Menocal, Scheindlin and Sells, eds., *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature*, pp. 388–403.

What is the point of recalling your splendour?  
 [...]
   
 Laughs of rash love when young and twenty
   
 At sixty I groan under their weight...<sup>108</sup>

The underlying causes of *ḥanīn* are associated not only with distance from one's original point of departure, which is subject to a process of mythicisation ("Oh Paradise from which I was expelled!"), but above all with the sundering of affective ties ("the splendid friends") and to the loss of the primordial phase of one's own existence.<sup>109</sup> The invocation of "youth" is significant in this regard also, precisely because the discourse of nostalgia is inscribed on the horizon of a time now lost, even in terms of sentimental experiences ("Laughs of rash love when young and twenty..."). The precise indication of the age reached by the poet ("At sixty I groan under their weight...") serves simply to reinforce the previous image, creating a hiatus between carefree youth, a space-time of "lost and happy follies," and the crepuscular phase now attained.

If Ibn Ḥamdīs was more often able, and more successfully, to render the sentiment of nostalgia in poetic form, other poets did nonetheless produce compositions in which there was expressed an inner turmoil, linked to a mnemonic phenomenon, which could even lead to sickness and death. Consider, for example, the case of Abū Muḥammad Qāsim al-Tamīmī, who lived through the period of the *fitna* and witnessed the clashes between Muslims and Christians. His poems also reflect the classical theme of separation from the loved place, now in the hands of the barbarian invaders, and a bitterness at having to emigrate from the island upon which his dearest friends lived.<sup>110</sup> According to what is reported in the *Kharīdat al-Qaṣr* of al-İṣfāhānī, who was educated in Ifrīqiya but had lived in Sicily, in Palermo, we should also credit a little known 'Abd al-Hālim b. 'Abd al-Wāḥid with the following verses in which the Island is for the poet a "garden of eternal happiness" which had been transformed through the coming of the Normans into a living hell:

I loved Sicily in my early youth: it seemed a garden of eternal happiness  
 I had not had the time to reach maturity when, behold, the country had  
 been transformed into a burning gehenna.<sup>111</sup>

<sup>108</sup> See *Poeti arabi di Sicilia*, ed. Maria Francesca Corrao (Milan, 1987), pp. 131 and 133.

<sup>109</sup> See Antonio Prete, ed., *Nostalgia. Storia di un sentimento* (Milan, 1992).

<sup>110</sup> See *Antologia della poesia araba*, ed. Francesca Maria Corrao (Rome, 2004), p. 257.

<sup>111</sup> See *BAS* ar., 2: 705–706; *BAS* it., 3: p.758.

In Abū 'l-ʿArab al-Ṣiqillī, who, after the advent of the Normans, left Sicily and went to Andalusia, where he composed numerous poems in praise of the prince, his patron, al-Muʿtamid b. ʿAbbād,<sup>112</sup> we find the same sentiment of loss, though expressed in a different fashion. In one of his encomiastic songs, in particular, we find an interesting and somewhat different slant on the motif of nostalgia. The poet seeks to overcome the pain of distance by inverting the terms: it is not he that is forced by human agency to leave his native land but it is this latter that drives him out and renders acceptable to him the idea, expressed in the guise of hope, of his seeking his fortune elsewhere, in fact at the court of the ruler of Seville:

And you, my homeland! Since you abandon me, I shall go away and be in  
the nests of the generous eagles!  
I was born of earth and the whole Earth is a homeland to me: all men are  
my kin!<sup>113</sup>

The terminology employed (homeland, earth, kin, origins), which refers to the sphere of memory, serves in a decisive fashion to emphasise the relationship between past and present, between the distant homeland and the new refuge. These are verses which, probably on account of their actual purpose, radically alter the representation of nostalgia as a sentiment. Indeed, the poet achieves a shift in emphasis: he no longer speaks of “illness” but of “lack” and, above all, of the “human” capacity to adapt and integrate into a new environment. The notion of nostalgia is tied to the land of origin, to a “prior” and privileged place. The concept’s transformation is here indicative of an alteration in the condition of the poet, who insists on the need to insert himself into his current environment, that is, the court of al-Muʿtamid. The “return” that was supposed to fill the void of absence and to compensate for the “departure” is no longer an idea present in the mind of the poet who feels the need to be received in the “nests of the generous eagles.” For him, now, “the whole Earth” is homeland. Obviously in this case too we have to do with a motif already employed by other poets (the anthologist al-İṣfāhānī in fact is at pains to stress that this concept tallies with that of the poet Ibn al-Muʿtazz), one which proves nonetheless to be very interesting, above all in relation to the various functions that the motif of nostalgia assumes within praise poems.

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<sup>112</sup> See ʿAbbās, *Muʿjam*, pp. 237–44.

<sup>113</sup> See *BAS* ar., 2: 734; *BAS* it., 3: 793.



The consolatory motive is, however, wholly absent from the verses by another poet from Palermo, namely, Abū Ḥafṣ ‘Umar b. Raḥīq,<sup>114</sup> a man whose heart is full of nostalgia and longing for familiar feelings and for the homeland.<sup>115</sup> The poet, who alludes to an enforced separation, once again occurring after the Norman conquest and without his nearest and dearest having been able to bid him farewell, says that he is inconsolable:

Hard is it to bear this calamity that has befallen me,  
And the sudden separation leaves me quite bereft.<sup>116</sup>

Scholars of Arabo-Sicilian literature have generally shown an interest in the nostalgic compositions of those poets who, having been forced to leave the Island after the coming of the Normans, have helped to fashion mythologised images of their place of origin. Conversely, very little attention has been paid to those men of letters who felt themselves to be exiles in Palermo when it was still Islamic and who here composed verses about the pain engendered by distance. Thus, the *Rihla* of al-Tijānī reproduces extracts from a *qaṣīda* by the poet Muḥammad b. ‘Abdūn al-Sūsī, belonging to a family from Qayrawān that had then moved to Susa, who went to Sicily and to the court of the emir Yūsuf b. ‘Abd Allāh Thiqaṭ al-Dawla.<sup>117</sup> His qualities as panegyrist were much appreciated there, both by the father and by the son, Ja‘far. Though handsomely rewarded and heaped with honours, Muḥammad b. ‘Abdūn never ceased to feel the “lack” of his country and the desire to return. Some highly evocative verses of his beg the Mountain of al-Mu‘askar (probably Monte Grifone, which stands behind Palermo)<sup>118</sup> to allow the wind from Tunisia to pass so that he can ask it for news “of what friends in the castle (of Ṭāriq) are doing” and receive replies too. The emir Ja‘far, having heard these verses, was so full of admiration that he prevented the poet from leaving the court, despite his repeated requests to be discharged. The motif elaborated upon here is that of a delay to the poet’s “return,” serving to revive his nostalgia.

<sup>114</sup> See ‘Abbās, *Mu‘jam*, pp. 154–55.

<sup>115</sup> According to Amari (*BAS* it., 3: 796, n. 225), the city to which these verses allude may well be Mahdiyya, which was abandoned in the space of a few hours, at the mere sight of Roger’s army. Iḥsān ‘Abbās and Shawqī Dayf (*Ta’rikh*, p. 399), for their part, have no doubt that the reference is to Palermo. The universal nature of the sentiment, and the Palermitan origins of the poet, do however allow us to attribute these verses to a Maghribian context.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> See *BAS* ar., 2: 434–36; *BAS* it., 1: 487–89.

<sup>118</sup> See *BAS* it., 1: 488, n. 13.

The “enforced” distance, the curbing of his liberty by Thiḡat al-Dawla and his son, served in actual fact to make the pleasure of the return last longer. It is no accident that al-Tijānī, in his account of the events linking Muḡammad b. ‘Abdūn to the emiral court in Palermo, places the emphasis upon the poet’s ability, which is at one and the same time the cause of his good fortune (for the noteworthy remuneration lavished upon him) and of his misfortune (for the denial of his freedom to return to his native land). The poet also addressed a letter to Thiḡat al-Dawla in which, though praising his generosity, he made a reference to the homeland, to his feelings and to the desire for return, the sole remedy for the “pain” of the nostalgic man:

If over there you sleep, oh I am ever awake to weep for you, and  
 Anyone who weeps over a (past) life deserves to be forgiven.  
 There is so much pain in me that if it welled up from my heart and swept  
 over you  
 Oh then the houses surrounding you would burst into flames.<sup>119</sup>

For all those who sang of their nostalgia for Sicily or when in Sicily, the literary production of exile had a therapeutic value serving to assuage anxiety and the sense of loss. Indeed, the absence of once familiar voices, faces and places, painfully noted by the poets, was transformed into a storehouse of images: past time can only exist through poetic language and by dint of remembering it, through the “resonance” that it is capable of generating. Poetry welcomes such remembrances and imparts a new life to them.

#### BELLES LETTRES

The sources record numerous titles of works in prose and in verse by Arabo-Sicilian authors which have not come down to us, and which will ultimately, we hope, be traced and published, so as to complete the panorama of medieval Arabic literary and cultural production in the Islamic Maghrib.<sup>120</sup> Favoured genres included the collections of *adab*, of which

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<sup>119</sup> *BAS ar.*, 2: 435; *BAS it.*, 1: 488.

<sup>120</sup> The recent discoveries, editions and studies of new Arabic sources show how necessary it is to persevere with investigations into Islamic Sicily. As regards the literature, in particular, and the obstacles, some of them ideological, to progress in our understanding, I refer the reader to Maria Rosa Menocal, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History: A Forgotten Heritage* (Philadelphia, 1987), p. 118 and n. 2.

the anthology of Ibn al-Qaṭṭā' is an emblematic example, epistolography and the Maqāmāt.

Amongst the works which are extant, I shall comment briefly on just two of them, reasons of space precluding a fuller treatment. I refer to the *Zahr* of Ibn Qalāqis, to which I have already had recourse for the praise poetry it contains, and to the *Subwān al-Muṭā'* of Ibn Ḥafar al-Ṣiqillī.<sup>121</sup> These works, belonging to different genres, reflect, though in diverse and complementary ways, the relations between men of letters and power in Norman Sicily, and they may also help to clarify the cultural policies implemented on the Island.

The *Zahr al-bāsim* is a text which may be ascribed to the *adab* system. The aim of the work is expressed by its author in the *incipit*. He in fact asserts that in it he has collected verses aligned "like pearls in a noble necklace," in accordance with an image often used in classical Arabic literature.<sup>122</sup> Furthermore, Ibn Qalāqis explains that his intention was to recount his own journey in Sicily at the time of William II, defining the island as a "territory of the Sublime Kingdom," and to tell of his frequenting illustrious personages from the Palermitan court and the family of the Banū Ḥammūd.<sup>123</sup> Indeed, it is to a member of this same line, descended from that of the prophet of Islam, namely, Abū' l-Qāsim, that Ibn Qalāqis dedicates the text in question, which "satisfies whoever aspires to seek out their own virtues" and "fulfils whoever sets out in search of their own probity."<sup>124</sup> In the "fertile meadow" of the foremost among the Muslims of Sicily, the poet of Alexandria, like a shepherd who has abandoned the "desert shore," finds refuge and favour. In a difficult phase of his life, in the middle of "a path bristling with obstacles and dangers,"<sup>125</sup> caused by events unknown to us, and despite the fact that Egypt was then ruled by a king worthy of praise, that is, Abū Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh b. Yūsuf al-'Adid li-Dīn Allāh (died 1171), Ibn Qalāqis arrived in Sicily, in Messina (11 May 1168), after a perilous journey narrated in verses that give voice to the fears, hopes and inner turmoil unleashed by the storm.<sup>126</sup> In reality he had already addressed a missive to the Lord of the Muslims of the Island, asking

<sup>121</sup> Ibn Ḥafar, *Subwān al-Muṭā' ossiano Conforti politici*, Ital. trans. Michele Amari, ed. Paolo Minganti (Palermo, reprinted 1973).

<sup>122</sup> De Simone, *Splendori*, p. 37.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., pp. 42–44.

him to finance his pilgrimage to Mecca and receiving a positive response.<sup>127</sup> Within the account of this Sicilian adventure, therefore, which functions as a sort of narrative frame, there were inserted texts in rhymed prose and in verses of great artistic and historical interest: the correspondence between the author and Abū' l-Qāsim b. Ḥammūd; the praise poems, defined as “pearls with which to adorn the necks of illustrious persons,” to which I devoted some space above; the epistolary exchange, touching upon various arguments, between Ibn Qalāqis and the poet and friend al-Umawī, who was supposed, in a particular phase, to serve as a mediator between himself and the important *gaito*;<sup>128</sup> descriptive verses (*wasf*) concerning royal residences, wine, loves and the account of the breaking of the fast of *ramaḍān*;<sup>129</sup> a learned dispute of a linguistic nature between the poet and a personage called al-Sharīf al-Makīn, perhaps to be identified with Idrīsī,<sup>130</sup> regarding the appropriateness of reading *'alaq* (blood, but also affect, affection, dispute) or, conversely, *'ulaq* (crowd, death, calamity) in a verse by Ibn al-Labbāna featured in a *muwashshaha* on the dynasty of the Banu 'Abbād, lords of south-western Spain;<sup>131</sup> a genealogical dissertation on the Quraysh, containing a long list of illustrious personages belonging to that line.<sup>132</sup> From the picture we have sketched, characterised by a dialectic of reality and fiction which often verges on verisimilitude, from the constant recourse to quotation, from the alternation between verse and prose, from the succession of arguments of various kinds, there emerges in filigree important historico-cultural—and also ethical—information. For example, the testimonies relating to the request advanced to Ibn Qalāqis by the Syracusans to intercede with the important *gaito* to relieve them of the payment of the *jizya*, particularly onerous for them, are highly instructive.<sup>133</sup> They refer to the economic hardship and harassment suffered by Muslims in the Norman period. Such testimonies help by the same token

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., pp. 46–49.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., pp. 72–80.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., pp. 58–66.

<sup>130</sup> A. De Simone, “Un'ipotesi su al-Idrisi geografo e poeta,” in Antonino Pellitteri and Giovanni Montaina, eds., *Azhār. Studi arabo-islamici in memoria di Umberto Rizzitano* (Palermo, 1995), pp. 111–23.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., pp. 109–113.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., pp. 113–18.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., p. 88 and n. 155 (for some comment upon the identity of the ultimate recipient of the request, who may have been Riccardo Palmer), and p. 89.

to bring out the complexity of relationships at court and the actual functioning of the *dīwān*.<sup>134</sup>

In addition, through Ibn Qalāqīs we are able to gain some idea of the liveliness and refinement of the cultural life that unfolded in this period at the Norman court, and of the calibre of the poets and men of letters who attended. The gift of the book entitled *Abolition of the evident qualities and alteration of the witticisms* by Ibn Rashīq, which the author of the *Zahr* received from his friend, the poet al-Umawī, in response to a request he himself had made, probably with reference to a question the two of them had already discussed;<sup>135</sup> the dispute over the vocalisation of a word in a *muwashshaha* by the Andalusian poet Ibn al-Labbāna, from which the author of the *Zahr* does however quote a verse mistakenly attributed to Ibn Ḥamdīs;<sup>136</sup> the continuous reference to a knowledge assembled by an imaginary built up by preceding generations; and, lastly, the actual form of the letters, corresponding to preconstituted Islamic models, together allow us to reconstruct the intellectual activity that was played out in Palermo in these years, without thereby mitigating the difficulties Muslims had to face when outside the court. Finally, the narrative also sheds light on questions relating to etiquette. Consider, for example, the suggestions made by al-Umawī and collected by Ibn Qalāqīs regarding the appropriateness of composing and sending a letter of congratulations to the brother of Abū' l-Qāsim, that is, to Abū 'Alī Ḥasan b. Ḥammūd, on the birth of a son on 2 January 1169.<sup>137</sup>

This same work also confirms how those Arab men of letters who were active in, or who passed through Norman Sicily, did not form relationships with poets and men of letters from other cultural traditions, those “good writers of verse” and “most excellent singers” who were nonetheless present at the court of the “good” King William. Instead, they found in the Island Muslim representatives, figures present at court because they were useful for the consolidation of the new state structures, and felt themselves to be a part rather of a universal, and profoundly Islamic, cultural system, as is demonstrated by the debates and questions to which Ibn Qalāqīs refers, and by the actual content of the exchanges between Abū

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<sup>134</sup> It is no accident that Jeremy Johns has devoted a paragraph of his book on the Norman administration in Sicily to Abū' l-Qāsim b. Ḥammūd: Johns, *Arabic Administration*, pp. 234–42.

<sup>135</sup> De Simone, *Splendori*, p. 80.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 101–104.

al-Ṣalt and Abū al-Ḍaw'. The putative fusion between East and West at the Norman court, in what has been defined by a particular historiography as an *aetas aurea*, is not borne out by what we observe in the field of belles lettres,<sup>138</sup> and was not in the least the consequence of an exemplary spirit of tolerance. It would seem to be more accurate, in fact, to speak of a "coexistence" deriving either from the shortcomings of the culture of which the Normans were the bearers, due to the meagreness and heterogeneity of the forces at their disposal, or from their political adeptness at avoiding breaches by using to their own advantage, for the building of a new and greater State, those socio-cultural components that were otherwise viewed as negative and irreconcilable factors.<sup>139</sup>

#### WATERS OF COMFORT

The *Subwān al-Muṭā'* or *Political consolations* of Ibn Ḍafar al-Ṣiqillī,<sup>140</sup> is a work belonging to the genre known as mirror for princes.<sup>141</sup> This text, first published in Tunis in 1862,<sup>142</sup> was translated by Michele Amari into Italian in 1851,<sup>143</sup> on the basis of an unpublished critical edition reconstructed by himself during his Parisian exile, through the collation of manuscripts at his disposal in the Bibliothèque Royale. The work has one peculiarity: there exist two different drafts, with variants in its preface reflecting the posts held by the two personages to whom it was dedicated at different

<sup>138</sup> The concept is reiterated on many occasions by Karla Mallette in her *The Kingdom of Sicily*, although it handles the three cultures in a unitary perspective, connected to their cohabitation within the same geographical context.

<sup>139</sup> One simply has to reflect upon the fact that at the time of William II the language most used at court was French, and that, according to Ugo Falcando's account, the brother of Queen Marguerite could not hold high office because he did not know this language well enough. See Resta, "La cultura siciliana nell'età normanna," p. 269.

<sup>140</sup> See Hrair Dekmejian and Adel Fathy Thabit, "Machiavelli's Arab Precursor: Ibn Ḍafar al-Ṣiqillī," *Middle Eastern Studies* 27 (2000), 125–37.

<sup>141</sup> There is an extensive bibliography on this literary genre. I shall refer here only to some of the essential studies: Jocelyne Dakhliā, *Le divan des roi: le politique et le religieux dans l'Islam* (Paris, 1998); Stefan Leder, "Aspekte arabischer und persischer Fürstenspiegel. Legitimation, Fürstenethik, politische Vernunft," in Angela de Benedictis, ed., *Specula Principum* (Frankfurt-on-Main, 1999), pp. 156–64; Patricia Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought* (Edinburgh, 2004); Charles-Henri de Fouchecour, *Le sage et le prince en Iran médiéval* (Paris, 2010); Denise Aigle, "La conception du pouvoir dans l'Islam. Miroirs des princes persans et théorie sunnite (XI<sup>e</sup>–XIV<sup>e</sup> siècles)," *Perspectives médiévales* 31 (2007), 17–44.

<sup>142</sup> I believe that a new edition was published in Cairo in 1978 by Abū Nakla Aḥmad b. Abī'l-Majīd.

<sup>143</sup> The translation was republished in Palermo in 1973, see note 121 above.

times and in different places. This feature is as a rule found in praise poems which were sometimes addressed by one and the same poet to different personages or patrons, with minimal changes, generally relating to the name of the dedicatee. The supposition is that the anonymous addressee of the first drafting was Mujīr al-Dīn, the Governor of Damascus until such time as he was driven out by Nūr al-Dīn in 1154. The former found himself in a difficult situation on account of a rebel who had tried to wrest power from him, plotting with some notables from Mujīr al-Dīn's own circle and setting them at odds with his subjects. Mujīr al-Dīn was thus a personage whose need for "counsel" and "consolation" in ruling his own Kingdom was satisfied by Ibn Zafar through a text explicitly modelled upon the famous *Book of Kalila and Dimna*, attributed to Ibn al-Muqaffa' (died c. 757). This was an Arabic revisiting of a work with Indo-Iranian origins (*Pančatantra*) which, through stories in part recounted by animals (the title evokes the name of two jackals), furnishes advice on good government.

The author of the *Sulwān* lays stress, in the first drafting of the work, addressed to "a King of egregious deeds and intentions," on the duties of those princes and sovereigns who have especially onerous tasks: defending subjects from whoever seeks to attract them through flattery, watching over their safety in spaces public and private, ensuring a balance between strong and weak so that the rights of the latter are not sacrificed to those of the former, concerning themselves with the transmission of knowledge guaranteeing cultural growth, and employing divine rules, and nothing else, in promoting public utility. The whole of this part, however, followed by moral tales about sovereigns, is missing from the draft done in Sicily, probably because it was regarded as superfluous and inadequate for the addressee in Norman Palermo. The "Sicilian" draft only contains a dissertation on the modalities and structure of the composition, along with references to stories which were very useful to "the most famous monarchs in the world" and jealously guarded by them for fear that they might be spread abroad.<sup>144</sup>

Although Michele Amari had originally supposed that the dedicatee of the *Subwān al-muṭā'*, perhaps written in Sicily in 1159–1160, was the same person for whom Ibn Qalāqis had composed his *Zahr*,<sup>145</sup> recent research lead us to doubt such a hypothesis and to think that it may instead have been this same personage's father, namely, Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad b.

<sup>144</sup> Ibn Zafar, *Sulwān*, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>145</sup> See *BAS* ar., 2: 836; *BAS* it., 3: p. 906.

Abī' l-Qāsim b. 'Alī b. al-'Alawī al-Qurashī.<sup>146</sup> This work, which met with notable success right from the start, was divided into five parts, exactly like the text upon which it was modelled, the *Kalīla and Dimna*, dedicated in turn to abandoning oneself to God, to consolation, to constancy, to knowing how to achieve contentment and to abnegation. Within the individual chapters the material is organised in a strictly hierarchical fashion.<sup>147</sup> The author, conforming to the dialectical relationship between the word of power and the power of the word in Islam, begins with the divine word, the one that dogma defines as inimitable and perfect, and which is situated at the beginning of History. Ibn Z̄afar therefore offers the powerful man first of all a garland of Koranic verses on the argument that he is about to address, which are followed by a series of *ḥadīth*, in which the “word” of the prophet Muḥammad also assumes the guise of “action.” The prophet is the exemplary model to which all must refer, both through what he has said and through what he has done. In the third position, according to the hierarchical order of the discourses of which the *Subwān* consists, are located the “philosophical dicta in prose and in rhyme,” represented in the main by wise maxims uttered by authoritative personages or by verses of poetry, always present in the collections of *adab*. Finally we come to those discoveries defined by Ibn Z̄afar as a “beautiful garden and a noble gymnasium,” which exercise intellects through the solving of puzzles, and perhaps reflect the ideology of the secret characteristic of medieval literary production in East and West.<sup>148</sup>

The drafting or rather the transplanting of a work of this kind, dedicated to a Muslim notable in Norman Sicily, simply serves to confirm, from my perspective, both the universal nature of the mirrors for princes, easily adaptable to different contexts in different periods, as the success of this genre shows, and their capacity to sum up, and to cleave to, the requirements of a cultural life organised around the court. Its presence in

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<sup>146</sup> See Adalgisa De Simone, “Una ricostruzione del viaggio in Sicilia di Ibn Qalāqīs sulla base dell’*al-Zahr al-bāsim*,” in *Arabi e Normanni in Sicilia (Atti del Convegno internazionale euro-arabo, Agrigento 22–23–24 Febbraio 1992)* (Agrigento, 1993), pp. 109–125; “*Al-Zahr al-bāsim* di Ibn Qalāqīs e le vicende dei musulmani nella Sicilia normanna,” in *Del nuovo sulla Sicilia musulmana*, pp. 99–152: p. 107; *Splendori*, p. 107, n. 97. The same point is made in Dayf, *Ta’rikh*, p. 419. On this question see also Johns, *Arabic Administration*, p. 235, n. 96.

<sup>147</sup> Mirella Cassarino, “Come rivolgersi all’autorità. I Conforti politici di Ibn Z̄afar il Siciliano,” in Antonella Ghersetti, ed., *La parola del potere, il potere della parola, tra Europa e Mondo arabo-ottomano tra Medioevo ed Età Moderna* (Venice, 2010), pp. 26–45.

<sup>148</sup> See William Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature, Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Culture* (Princeton, 1994).



Norman Sicily, obviously regarded as “useful,” is not linked to the variegated social reality of the island but is inscribed in the sumptuous salons of the royal palace or in the sublime residences of the Banū Ḥammūd.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL WORK OF AL-IDRĪSĪ: BETWEEN SCIENCE AND *ADAB*

The monumental work entitled *Kitāb Nuzhat al-mushtāq fi ikhtirāq al-afāq* (*Diversion for one passionate about touring the world*), better known under the title *Kitāb Rujār* or *Roger's Book*, was planned, funded and realised at the court of Roger II and of his successor. It arose out of the encounter between the lively intellect of the Kingdom's founder and the geographer and man of letters Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Muḥammad Ibn Idrīs al-‘Alī bi-amr Allāh al-Idrīsī, who, thanks to the drafting of this treatise, would become one of the most representative figures of Sicilian Arabo-Norman culture.<sup>149</sup> In the personality of al-Idrīsī, the classical formation of the *adīb*, the man endowed with a high level of general culture embracing the religious sciences, philology and poetry, was wonderfully combined with a specialist knowledge of the medical, pharmacological, botanical and geographical sciences. Along with some of his verses,<sup>150</sup> we also have an important pharmacopoeia entitled *Kitāb al-jāmi‘ li-ṣifāt ashtāt al-nabāt wa-durūb anwā‘ al-mufradāt* (*Compendium of the properties of diverse plants and various kinds of single drugs*),<sup>151</sup> a work in which he attributes to the plants used in a medical context a specific name in various different languages (for example, Syriac, Greek, Persian, Latin, Berber).<sup>152</sup>

The *Praefatio* to Roger's Book<sup>153</sup> follows faithfully in its every part the schema employed by the medieval Arab authors of *adab*: the section dedicated to praise of the Most High is followed in fact by that concerned with the exaltation of the qualities of the Norman sovereign and the classical “investiture rite” of the author and coordinator of the venture by

<sup>149</sup> On the biography of al-Idrīsī and the problems it poses, not least as regards the dating of his work, I refer the reader to Annliese Nef, “Al-Idrīsī: un complément d'enquête biographique,” in *Géographes et voyageurs au Moyen Age*, pp. 53–66, which contains all the earlier bibliography on this same argument.

<sup>150</sup> See De Simone, “Un'ipotesi su al-Idrīsī geografo e poeta,” pp. 111–23.

<sup>151</sup> Ed. Fuad Setzgin (Frankfurt, 1995).

<sup>152</sup> A linguistic study of some aspects of this text and of the *Nuzha* has been undertaken by Cristina La Rosa in the context of a Doctorate in progress at the University of Venice.

<sup>153</sup> Al-Idrīsī, *Opus Geographicum*, ed. Alessio Bombaci *et alii* (Naples and Rome, 1970–1976), 1, pp. 3–14.

his patron.<sup>154</sup> Roger is lauded for his noble origins, which in his case are combined with nobility of mind, for his discernment and wide-ranging knowledge, for his perspicacity and grasp of the art of good government, for the might he displayed when “he has conquered to the East and to the West; he has brought low those tyrants who are his co-religionists, far and near, mustering armies exceedingly strong in numbers and in instruments of war . . .”.<sup>155</sup> In addition, the work’s scope and its method are described. The bounds of the kingdom having been extended and projects of government enlarged, the Sovereign thought to ascertain the condition of the territories acquired and to arrive at a precise understanding of the confines, the routes by sea and by land and the different climates. The desire for knowledge, which was also politically motivated, embraced other countries and regions. Where method was concerned, it was supposed to be based upon a comparison between details gleaned from bookish knowledge (the Prologue lists the titles of a series of important geographical works composed prior to that date), not always wholly satisfactory, with those drawn from the direct experience of geographers and travellers summoned to court and quizzed, over a period of fifteen years, regarding the more obscure and uncertain arguments. Roger likewise wished to draw up a geographical map on which he marked the information collected, and he commissioned the construction of a silver planisphere, destroyed in 1161 when the palace was sacked, upon which was engraved, on the basis of what the map indicated, the subdivision of the world into seven climates, with the representation of regions, the configuration of territories, of seas and of roads. Along with scientific data, the book was also supposed to include elements of material culture, and likewise to furnish information on agricultural products, “the various manners of building and other particulars, the doings of men, the industries, the import and export trade, the wonders claimed by each country or attributed to it.” Nor, finally, should there be any shortage of information about the inhabitants, their appearance, nature, religion, adornment, dress and language. The next section concerned the general approach of the work, which made continuous reference to the Ptolemaic system, to the order it followed in

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<sup>154</sup> The geographer was here obeying an order pure and simple, namely, to compose a book, the actual title of which had been chosen by the sovereign.

<sup>155</sup> I cite this, and the other passages in English translation from the Italian translation by Michele Amari, as reproduced in the volume Gabrieli-Scerrato (4th ed, Milan, 1993), pp. 205–208.

treating the arguments and, finally, to the recording of details in seventy maps.

A late version of this same work, which may be dated to 1192, is known by the title of "Little Idrisi," and has only been published in part, provides a summary of the matter covered and contains some emendations.

This is not the place to examine the innovative features of this work, a valuable synthesis of Eastern and Western knowledge serving to make it a foundation-stone in the history of the geographical sciences, or to highlight its lacunae and the causes of the neglect it has suffered. Suffice it to say here that, with respect to the successes achieved by Idrīsī, his coverage appears to have been exhaustive, so far as the knowledge of the period is concerned, as regards Sicily and the Maghrib. The book's handling of its materials does, however, become gradually more phantastical, in relation to the countries of the Far East, such as China and India, and less precise in relation to northern Europe, even though many of the geographers and travellers at court came from the area.

I do, however, want to comment in passing on the cultural and political significance of Roger's monumental ventures. The sovereign was motivated by the desire to assemble and promote the Eastern inheritance, Arab and Byzantine, and to combine it with the European tradition. It was a matter, in short, of assuming a leading role in the realisation of a cultural project, in the wake of the work done by the philosopher kings, which was designed to lead to the establishment of a new geographical canon based upon the concordance of information compiled in various ways.<sup>156</sup> The decision to compose the work in Arabic is in itself significant, and reflects a very precise political line: Arabic, being the language of the most advanced scientific tradition, represented continuity and stability. A decade later this same decision would have been unthinkable.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

Our trajectory here has served to show that it is not always an easy matter to distinguish Palermo as experienced from Palermo as imagined. The

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<sup>156</sup> See the Introduction to Anliese Nef and Henri Bresc, *La première géographie de l'Occident* (Paris, 1999), p. 51. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Anliese Nef for inviting me to contribute to this volume, and also for her helpful and generous advice and observations. Thanks too to Giuseppe Mandalà with whom I have had fruitful exchanges of opinion.

city was at one and the same time the site of a conquest and a place to be defended. Travellers and pilgrims in transit had outlined the topography and the landscape, along with the architecture; first the mosques and then the churches, the baths, the squares and the markets, the walls, the castles, the royal palaces and the *ribāt*, representing them sometimes as places that could be experienced in person, sometimes as mental spaces. Palermo also manifested its own nature through the diversity of its languages (one or other of which might assume a primacy, depending upon the period), of the respective varieties and of the genres through which they found expression: aulic idioms employed at court, the “median” forms used in non-canonical written texts, and those spoken in the city streets and squares. Palermo was, depending upon the vantage point, centre and periphery, a place of confinement and a paradise. The poets had transposed the city into their verses as symbol and metaphor, representing it in the guise of the power, majesty and magnanimity of the princes and sovereigns who had ruled it, in the inner turmoil of the countless number who had lived in it as a place of exile and wandering and in the wistfulness of the migrants who had yearned to return to it.



THE HAUTEVILLE'S EXPERIMENT (XITH-XIITH)



## NORMAN PALERMO: THE CAPITAL OF A KINGDOM OR THE DREAM SCENE OF AN EMPIRE?

Annliese Nef

This chapter is designed to situate the famous creations of 12th-century Palermo in their ideological and political context. Since Elena Pezzini in the present volume tackles the question of the evolution of the urban fabric, Rosa Di Liberto offers a sort of guide to the city's monuments in the Norman period, and Laura Sciascia, who explores the city as political theatre, locates the Norman moment within the *longue durée*, my purpose here is not to rehearse points already made in these other chapters but in some sense to introduce them.

What was revealed at the majority of Roger II, with the transfer, in 1112, of the capital from Messina to Palermo, was a decision that was at once the outcome of an earlier development, whose details remain obscure for want of sources, and the inauguration of a new era for the Hauteville. This choice must be understood in relation to both a domestic and a Mediterranean context, since it in fact entailed moving the principal seat of government and of the court from the least Islamicised part of the island<sup>1</sup> to what, up until the middle of the 11th century, had been its Islamic capital, and remained its most important city, that is, Palermo. This same choice likewise led to a distancing of the capital from the Italian peninsula and from regions within which the magnates did not hesitate to challenge the comital power, as was the case in particular during the regency of Adelaide (1101–1112), and to a rapprochement with those Sicilian regions in which the elites were more Islamicised.

The difficulty we face in reconstructing this process lies in the fact that the documentation is thin prior to 1130, and that the temptation therefore arises to ascribe retrospectively to an earlier period the idea of a political construct elaborated step by step on the ground, in the course

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<sup>1</sup> Because the eastern part of the island had been wholly conquered over a century later than the western part, and because it had maintained its relationship with the Byzantine empire, even when under Islamic domination.



of an evolution entailing as many continuities<sup>2</sup> as discontinuities.<sup>3</sup> In particular, the part played by Adelaide in this decision can hardly have been minor, even if the sources do not mention it.<sup>4</sup> What is certain is that between 1130 and 1154 (the date of Roger II's death) there was established a court life in which a variety of different elements were intermingled, a mode of existence that was maintained subsequently,<sup>5</sup> although some resistance was displayed to such a synthesis during the reign of William I (1154–1166). One can in fact identify three distinct periods, which may be briefly characterised as follows. The first is a period of elaboration, during which we observe the integration of the contributions of contemporary courts and administrations, and the recasting of what was inherited from

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<sup>2</sup> One could cite several sources dating from the 12th century emphasising both that it was indeed a question of an active policy, and that contemporaries were conscious of continuities, and of discontinuities in this domain. I will reproduce just the one here, taken from Alexander of Teleso, who describes events relating to Roger II up until 1136. The passage in question describes the magnates advising Roger II to become king: *Qui etiam addebant quod regni ispius principium et caput, Panhormus sicilie metropolis fieri deceret; que olim sub priscis temporibus super hanc ipsam provinciam reges nonnullos habuisse traditur, qui postea, pluribus evolutis annis, occulto Dei disponente iudicio nunc usque sine regibus mansit* ("[The councillors] added that the centre and capital of the kingdom should have been Palermo, which, formerly, in the past, they said, had had kings who had ruled over the province [of Sicily], and which, subsequently, after many years, through an impenetrable divine plan, had remained without a king until that date," *Alexandri Telesini Abbatis ystoria Rogerii regis Sicilie Calabrie atque Apulie*, ed. Ludovica De Nava, comm. Dione Clementi (Rome, 1991), p. 23. On this topic, see Fulvio Delle Donne, "Liturgie del potere: le testimonianze letterarie," in Raffaele Licinio and Francesco Violante, eds., *Nascita di un regno. Poteri signorili, istituzioni feudali e strutture sociali nel Mezzogiorno normanno (1130–1194). Atti delle XVII Giornate normanno-seveve (Bari, 10–13 oct. 2006)*, ed. (Bari, 2008), pp. 331–68.

<sup>3</sup> One of the questions raised concerns the role played by continuity and local contributions in this process: ought we to see here solely borrowings from abroad or did a proportion of the elements described as "Byzantine" or as "Islamic" henceforth form part of insular practices and productions? Jeremy Johns has given a convincing account of the administrative borrowings from 12th-century Fatimid Egypt, in a context in which signs of an inheritance from the previous period have long been sought: Jeremy Johns, *Arabic Administration in Norman Sicily. The Royal Dīwān* (Cambridge, 2002). At the same time, it would be a mistake to exaggerate the rupture, and it is likely that a certain number of continuities, themselves not immune to further development, served to link the period of the Hauteville to the Islamic period, particularly at the local level.

<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the idea of Roger II taking this decision on his own, and at the age of 17, defies belief. We ought moreover to relate such an action to Adelaide's marriage to Baudouin I of Jerusalem, in 1113, the negotiations for which included the stipulation that Roger II inherit the kingdom of Jerusalem. On Adelaide's very prominent political role, see Hubert Houben, "Adelaide 'del Vasto' nella storia del regno normanno di Sicilia," in Id., *Mezzogiorno Normanno-Svevo. Monasteri e castelli, ebrei e musulmani* (Naples, 1996), pp. 81–105.

<sup>5</sup> An assertion which contradicts neither the reality of the growing Latinisation of the population at large, nor the Hauteville's policy of exalting Christianity.

the previous period, for which the documentation is uneven. It extends from 1101 to 1154, with a marked acceleration from 1125–1130 (when George of Antioch assumed an increasingly important role and when Roger II ascended the throne).<sup>6</sup> The second is a period of revolts orchestrated by the Latin magnates, who set out to denounce royal policies deemed “tyrannical,” their criticisms covering such things as the presence of eunuchs, the limited importance accorded to the Latin magnates, etc. This period extended from 1154 to 1161, but coloured the whole of the reign of William I, dubbed “Bad” (1154–1166). It was reflected in the liquidation of the Norman *emporia* in Ifrīqiya (between the death of Roger II and 1160), on account of both the sovereign’s seemingly limited interest in their preservation and the advance of the Almohads. A third period comprised the regency of Margaret (1166–1171) and the reign of William II (1171–1189). It witnessed the revival, despite recurrent periods of tension, of a synthetic approach to government, which offered some leeway to the Latin magnates, and promoted Mediterranean expansion; William II was incontestably the most Arabophone of the sovereigns, and the one most deeply aware of Islamic culture, belonging as he did to the Hauteville dynasty.

The elements of which court life consisted throughout the 12th century formed part of a Mediterranean koiné: royal ceremonial synthesising a wide range of different contributions, the presence of eunuchs, patronage extended to learned Arabo-Muslims passing through the court, the existence of a royal textiles workshop reworking Islamic and Byzantine designs, Islamic and Byzantine architectural and artistic inspirations,<sup>7</sup> etc. The government itself reflected such choices, as is evident from the employment of three different Chancellery languages, the centrality of the *dīwān al-ma’mūr*, the royal titles and the names of administrative functions taking their inspiration from Byzantium and from the Fatimids.<sup>8</sup> A synthesis

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<sup>6</sup> With regard to this aspect of Roger II’s policy, a number of interesting observations may be found in Hubert Houben, *Roger II of Sicily: A Ruler between East and West* (Cambridge, 2002, translated by Graham A. Loud and Diane Milburn), and in articles on the same topic in *Byzantino-Sicula V. Giorgio di Antiochia; l’arte della politica in Sicilia nel XII secolo tra Bisanzio e l’Islam (Atti del convegno internazionale, Palermo, 19–20 avril 2007)* (Palermo, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> On this last point, see the chapter by Rosa Di Liberto in the present volume.

<sup>8</sup> For a treatment of all these aspects of the question, one should consult Johns, *Arabic Administration* and Annliese Nef, *Conquérir et gouverner la Sicile islamique aux XI<sup>e</sup> et XII<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Rome, 2011).

of this kind could not exist without a minimal religious ecumenicalism,<sup>9</sup> reminiscent to a degree of the contemporary eastern empires.

These deliberate borrowings from contemporary political conceptions reflected the imperial ambitions of the dynasty of the Hauteville, who only drew inspiration from political notions cultivating this same dimension, even if they refrained from doing so on the Latin side, where they took their cue from the royal function, thereby adapting to a different imaginary and to different political realities. It is worth emphasizing that such ambitions were not simply an ideological stance: they began to be realized through the subjection of the political units in southern Italy in the course of the years between 1120 and 1130, through the seizing control of the coastal Ifriqiyān cities (second half of the 1130s–end of the 1140s), through the relations established with the Fatimids and Byzantium, but also through formulating a specific response to the first crusades, which combined abstaining from all military involvement with a marriage alliance (between Adelaide and Baldwin I of Jerusalem).

Historians may agree about the above facts, but not about their interpretation: were these choices concerned solely with matters outside Sicily or were they also designed to reinforce the internal cohesion of the insular society, or at any rate of its elites, by not granting a one-sided and unlimited power to the Latin magnates? The terms the sources of the period use to describe the disintegration of the Norman dynasty lend some credence to the first interpretation,<sup>10</sup> but there is also cause to doubt whether the social dynamics can always have been so mechanical.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, the very lamentations of the authors invoked in support of the first interpretation could be an indication of their adherence to this same ideological construction.<sup>12</sup> It is in fact clear that such a synthesis, even if partial, even

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<sup>9</sup> Ead., “Imaginaire impérial, empire et œcuménisme religieux: quelques réflexions depuis la Sicile des Hauteville,” *Cahiers de Recherches Médiévales et Humanistes* 24 (2013), pp. 227–249 and <http://crm.revues.org/index.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Johns, *Arabic Administration*. According to this same author, such a policy was designed to serve as a sort of political communication aimed at contemporary sovereigns, and he highlights the contrast with the all too effective treatment meted out to the Muslims in Sicily by the Hauteville (the execution of Philip of Mahdia in 1153; anti-Muslim movements in 1161).

<sup>11</sup> Annliese Nef, “État, agrégation des élites et redistribution des ressources dans la Sicile des XI<sup>e</sup>–XII<sup>e</sup> siècles: propositions pour une nouvelle interprétation,” in John Hudson, Ana Rodríguez and Eduardo Manzano, eds., *Diverging Paths*, in press.

<sup>12</sup> As, for example, in the case of the Pseudo-Falcando, in the *Letter to the Treasurer of Palermo*.

if limited to just one part of the elites, must have gone beyond the sovereign himself.

Paradoxically, then, even as the framework of the debate is rendered more precise, so too do the questions proliferate and become more complex. The chapters that follow are meant to emphasise this fact, by focusing on the evolution of the city of Palermo, while at the same time providing an update of the present state of our knowledge.



NORMAN PALERMO:  
ARCHITECTURE BETWEEN THE 11TH AND 12TH CENTURY

Rosa Di Liberto

In Sicily, between the end of the 11th and the 12th century, Norman architectural culture achieved a remarkable synthesis of formal and constructive contributions drawn from the further shores of Byzantine, Islamic and North European figurative invention, transfusing them into an original and unexpected language. The numerous achievements of crystalline figurativity in evidence on the island are the tangible sign of such protean cultural contributions, and of a Norman *koinè* that conferred so markedly distinctive a character upon them.<sup>1</sup>

The feverish building activity characteristic of this period, and especially of the reign of Roger II (1130–1154), was concentrated by and large in Palermo. In counterposing Christianity to the Islam of the defeated “infidels,” the calculated and programmatic intention of the Norman kings to transform the territory of Palermo into the capital of a kingdom found concrete expression in the building of three cathedrals (Cefalù, Palermo, Monreale), numerous churches (S. Giovanni dei Lebbrosi, S. Giovanni degli Eremiti, Santa Maria Maddalena, SS. Trinità or Magione, Santo Spirito or dei Vespri) and exquisite chapels inside palaces both royal and private (Cappella Palatina, Santa Maria dell’Ammiraglio known as the Martorana, S. Cataldo).

The preoccupation with political assertion and symbolic statement was complemented by the need to bolster the city’s defences so that its fortifications could withstand the new tactics elaborated in the *poliorcetica*. Although only a few fragments of the turreted circuit of walls may remain,<sup>2</sup> the Torre Pisana in the Palazzo dei Normanni, an impregnable bastion

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Sergio Aiosa for having read and criticised the present chapter. I would also like to thank Alessandra Bagnera for her helpful suggestions, Luna Figurelli for having assisted me in revising the English translation and Lina Bellanca for kindly granting me access to the photogrammetric mapping of the Cappella Palatina’s (Archivio Soprintendenza ai Beni Culturali di Palermo), upon which my drawings are based.

<sup>2</sup> Elena Pezzini, “Un tratto della cinta muraria della città di Palermo,” *MEFRM* 110/2 (1998), 719–771; Franco D’Angelo, “Le mura della Palermo del Trecento,” *Schede Medievali* 30–31 (1996), 47–64; Valeria Brunazzi, “L’epoca della costruzione delle mura urbane di Palermo e annotazioni sul rilievo di un loro tratto,” *ibid.*, 65–72; a reader wishing to grasp the

and, at the same time, the most aulic instance of Norman Sicilian fortified architecture, presents a cross-section of the advances made in the context of the *ars fortificatoria*.

A counterpart to the edifices built within the walls of Palermo was supplied by the suburban dwellings set in the midst of luxuriant gardens, designed for recreation and *otia*. At Mare Dolce or Favara, by means of impressive feats of hydraulic engineering, the water from the springs used to supply the city were channelled into a large artificial pond in the vicinity of the palace, with an attached chapel dedicated to Saints Philip and James. During the reigns of William I (1154–1166) and of William II (1166–1189), the “solaces” of the Zisa and of the Cuba, set in the midst of the park of the Genoardo (*Jannat al-ard*, Earthly Paradise) were built. The stereometric edifices, characterised by ogival blind arches that impart a rhythm to their facades, harmonise closely with the fountains and fishponds in which they are reflected. Not far from the Cuba was the Cuba Soprana, today subsumed within the eighteenth-century Villa Napoli, in whose garden the Piccola Cuba, a square pavilion surmounted by an extradosed dome, still survives.

In reconstructing the abovementioned picture of building projects realised in Palermo, I shall try to provide a synthesis which, while disdaining the none too rewarding philological approach, likewise shuns the rigid schematism of the traditional subdivisions applied to buildings, whether chronological (Conquest, Countship, Kingdom) or functional (religious, civil, military).<sup>3</sup> The approach adopted here will focus instead on the characteristics of the actual layouts and on the specific architectonic and formal solutions, which render the processes adopted on the island so very distinctive.

THE CHAPELS “OF THE KINGS:” CAPPELLA PALATINA, SANTA MARIA  
DELL’AMMIRAGLIO, SAN CATALDO

Though differing in ichnographic conception and in volumetric development, the Cappella Palatina, Santa Maria dell’Ammiraglio (both datable to

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topography of Palermo in the Norman period should consult Elena Pezzini’s contribution to the present volume, which also features a bibliography.

<sup>3</sup> Such classificatory criteria, which have long been traditional, were employed by Giuseppe Di Stefano in a pioneering study of Norman architecture: Di Stefano-Krönig. A critical survey of the specialist bibliography may be found in Gianluigi Ciotta, *La cultura architettonica normanna in Sicilia* (Messina, 1993).

around 1140) and S. Cataldo (c. 1160) each represent a particular inflection of a common artistic language. In the refinement of their architectural conception, these buildings reflect the culture of the most prestigious patrons in the Sicily of that period, respectively Roger II, the Admiral George of Antioch and his successor, Maio of Bari. In line with the programmatic choices of Roger II, translated into binding stylistic commitments by the architects, even the private chapels of his highest court dignitaries feature solutions involving symbolic elements that represent power, thereby revealing the status of the commission. The construction site of the Cappella Palatina and, earlier still, that of the cathedral of Cefalù, drew highly skilled workmen of diverse origins to Sicily, in response to the sovereign's explicit request. Their presence, and their repertoire of designs, gave rise to artistic conceptions that even impinged upon the choices of the greatest court dignitaries. The latter, just like the king, would decorate the facades of their churches with epigraphic bands surmounted by merlons, and the interiors with domes, polychrome marble floors and mosaic panelling. If the formal and figurative contributions from overseas indubitably played a decisive role in the formation of the new language, they nevertheless would seem to have been woven into a fabric of local experimentation and workshops. The latter's importance begins to emerge from the research presented in the most recent studies.

### *The Cappella Palatina*

Dedicated to Saint Peter, the chapel attached to the *Palatium Novum* or *superius Castrum* (today called the Palazzo dei Normanni) is the political manifesto of Roger II and his court and, at the same time, one of the most complete artistic expressions of the power of the Hauteville. The chapel was erected on top of the so-called crypt, an earlier chapel of more modest dimensions. Here, in all probability, Roger, *Comes Siciliae et Calabriae* since 1112, was crowned first king of Sicily, on Christmas Day, 1130.<sup>4</sup> There is no surviving documentary evidence which might help us to date this first church. One of the elements sustaining the conviction that it did indeed exist many years before the building of the Cappella Palatina is

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas Dittelbach, "La chiesa inferiore," in *Cappella Palatina*, pp. 283–93; Dorotée Sack, Steffi Platte, Monika Thiel and Jürgen Giese, "Bauforschung in der Unterkirche der Cappella Palatina in Palermo," *Architettura. Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Baukunst/journal of the History of Architecture* 37 (2007), 122–44; Vladimir Zoric, "Arx proeclara quam Palatium Regale appellant: le sue origini e la prima Cappella Palatina della Corte normanna," in Franco D'Angelo, ed., *La città di Palermo nel medioevo* (Palermo, 2002), pp. 85–193.



a document from 1112, in which Adelaide del Vasto, widow of Roger the Great Count and mother of the future king, noted that in the upper city there resided not only members of the aristocracy and ordinary soldiers, but also the archbishop and clerics. The residence in the palace of the religious lends credence to the notion that *in thalamo superioris castri nostri*<sup>5</sup> there must already have been a place of worship in which they might perform their liturgical functions. According to Thomas Dittelbach, this first church was built after Adelaide had transferred the Norman court from Messina to Palermo and, more precisely, “towards the end of the first decade of the 12th century.”<sup>6</sup>

The small church with three apses (c. 12×14 metres) is divided into three parts by means of two columns which separate the central aisle from the side aisles (see Fig. 6.1). Each of the aisles is subdivided into two bays covered with cross-vaulting. The chapel is linked by means of corridors to a rectangular hall (5.52×4.77 metres), barrel-vaulted and closed off by imposing widths of wall. There is as yet no firm evidence whatsoever for the view that this space was originally meant to house a royal tomb.<sup>7</sup> Such contexts should be linked chronologically to the building above it of the Cappella Palatina, since its structures serve as solid foundations. At the same time they enable a vertical link to be established between the two floors. According to such a hypothesis, the statical function of the rectangular hall accounts for the otherwise anomalous dimensions of its perimeter walls (5 metres). Despite some important divergences in the interpretation advanced by scholars of the few documents relating to its

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<sup>5</sup> *Ego Adalais Comitissa, et Rogerius filius meus gratia iam miles, iam Comes Siciliae et Calabriae, Panormi morantes, et in thalamo superioris castri nostri cum Gualterio praefatae urbis Archiepiscopo, et cum multis nostrorum tam clericorum, quam Baronum, et militum residentes, praedicto Archiepiscopo, et Canonicis hoc privilegium institui. Tabularium ecclesiae Panormitanae, 112, Indict. 5. Pridie idus mensis Iunii*, in Rocco Pirri, *Siciliae Sacrae*, I, coll. 60–61 (col. 60). In this regard see Dittelbach, “La chiesa inferiore,” p. 283, note 1.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 283. In essentially concurring with this hypothesis, William Tronzo ascribes the Cappella Palatina’s construction to the years between 1102 and 1115; William Tronzo, “L’architettura della Cappella Palatina,” in *Cappella Palatina*, pp. 79–99, p. 93. This scholar here returns to arguments treated at greater length in: *Id.*, *The cultures of his kingdom. Roger II and the Cappella Palatina in Palermo* (Princeton, 1997).

<sup>7</sup> According to Thomas Dittelbach, the sole documentary clue pointing to such a possible use of this space is the chronicle of Romualdo Salernitano, which recounts that William I, in 1166, had been buried in the Chapel of St. Peter in his palace (Dittelbach, “La chiesa inferiore,” p. 284; Thomas Dittelbach, Dorotée Sack, *La chiesa inferiore della Cappella Palatina a Palermo: Contesti, Progetti, Rilievi* (Künzelsau, 2005). William Tronzo, on the other hand, maintains that this space had been intended to house Roger’s tomb (Tronzo, “L’architettura,” p. 93).

construction,<sup>8</sup> there is a consensus in the recent bibliography to the effect that Roger II's coronation took place in this lower chapel and that the latter was raised to the status of parochial church in 1132, by archbishop Peter. The southern side of the building overlooked the palace and was also lit by absidal windows, which were then below ground. Its definitive demotion to the status of a subterranean "crypt" took place in 1567, when the windows were obscured by the buttressing of some rooms used in the administration of the palace, following the radical alterations put into effect by the Viceroy Vega and Maqueda.

Having become the first king of Sicily, Roger II conceived the plan for the new chapel, which was monumental and ambitious, and whose sanctuary is attested on the perimeter walls of the earlier place of worship (see Fig. 6.2). Given the great paucity of documents relating to the years in which the Cappella Palatina was built, which do not allow us to establish with any certainty either the date of its foundation or that of its completion, there inevitably exists a truly vast bibliography devoted to their interpretation, and numerous hypotheses with respect to dating. The sources under discussion are: a deed of dedication from 28 April 1140, preserved in the Tabularium of the Royal Cappella Palatina;<sup>9</sup> the date of 1143 imprinted in the Greek inscription which unfolds along the mosaics at the base of the dome; the evocative description of the building contained in the homily pronounced by Philagete of Cerami during the church's inaugural ceremony, known to us through an undated document.<sup>10</sup> In the sermon, delivered on 29th June, the feast day of Saints Peter and Paul, Philagete likens the marble floor of the church to an eternal spring, alluding to the

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<sup>8</sup> According to Vladimir Zoric', the first chapel had been dedicated to *Santa Maria Hyerusalem*, and would have been donated to Roger the Great Count by his highest court dignitary, the admiral and *protonobilissimus* Christophorus (Zoric', "*Arx proeclara*"). This hypothesis has been endorsed by Dittelbach, "*La chiesa inferiore*," p. 283). Beat Brenk, on the other hand, reckons that the church referred to in the document was in fact the private chapel of Christophorus, and that it was certainly not located in the vicinity of the palace. Furthermore, this same scholar maintains that the lower church, originally dedicated to the Madonna Odigitria, had been dedicated to Saint Peter after Roger II's coronation (Beat Brenk, "*L'importanza e la funzione della Cappella Palatina di Palermo nella storia dell'arte*," in *Cappella Palatina*, p. 31).

<sup>9</sup> *Tabularium regiae ac imperialis cappellae collegiatae divi Petri in regio Panormitano palatio Ferdinandi II. Regni utrisque Siciliae regis* (Palermo, 1835), 7, Nr. II.

<sup>10</sup> The homily has finally been translated into English and published with the Greek text on the opposite page, in Jeremy Johns, "The date of the ceiling of the Cappella Palatina in Palermo," in Ernst Grube and Jeremy Johns, eds., *The painted ceilings of the Cappella Palatina* (Genoa, 2005), pp. 1–9, which also contains a detailed and highly specific bibliography.

colours of the inlays and to the joyful deployment of the designs in the various panels (see Fig. 6.3), and its ceiling to a clear evening sky in which the stars are shining, making an explicit reference to the *theoria* of coffers in the form of eight-point stars, lined up in two parallel rows and framed by *muqarnas*, which decorate the central part of the nave.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, on the occasion of the inauguration, both the chapel floor and its phantasmagorical painted wooden ceiling had already been decorated.

Some scholars reckon that the two chronological clues, furnished by the deed of dedication and by the date at the base of the dome, indicate respectively the actual start of the building work and the completion of the mosaic decoration. More recently, Jeremy Johns, after a close scrutiny of the sources and of the relevant bibliography, has concluded that the homily was pronounced in 1143, a date at which there is a strong probability that the ceiling of the church had also been completed.<sup>12</sup> According to this same scholar, the year imprinted at the base of the dome must coincide with the finalisation of work on the sanctuary and the nave alike. Beat Brenk, on the other hand, brings the date of the homily back to 1140, the year in which the church was consecrated, maintaining that the mosaics in the presbytery were completed in 1143 and the mosaics in the longitudinal body “no later than circa? 1145,” whereas the mosaic decoration of the aisles and of the western wall belonged to the reigns of William I and William II.<sup>13</sup> At any rate, around 1140 work on the site of the Cappella Palatina must have been in large part completed.

As has been noted many times, the singularity of the architectural structure of the Cappella Palatina lies in the grafting of a Latin basilica with three aisles on to a wide sanctuary of Byzantine origin, whose central plan is highlighted by a hemispherical dome extradosed on a high octagonal tambour<sup>14</sup> (see Fig. 6.4). The tambour is connected to the circumference

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<sup>11</sup> Philagete's intention, Jeremy Johns observes, was to counterpose the floor, meaning the earthly, and the celestial ceiling, and, by means of this literary paradigm, to set up an analogy between the building of the Cappella Palatina and the divine act of Creation (Jeremy Johns, “Le pitture del soffitto della Cappella Palatina,” in *Cappella Palatina*, pp. 387–407, p. 388).

<sup>12</sup> Johns, “The date of the ceiling,” p. 7. More recently, when reiterating his hypothesis as regards the dating of the church, this same scholar asserts that the ceiling was “probably [completed] on 29 June 1143, and almost certainly within, and not beyond, 1147” (Johns, “Le pitture del soffitto”, p. 391).

<sup>13</sup> Brenk, “L'importanza e la funzione”, pp. 33, 34, 37.

<sup>14</sup> Alterations, and the addition of new structures to the Palazzo dei Normanni mean that it is no longer possible to appreciate from the outside the volume of the dome, which originally was supposed to stand out from the structure of the church.

of the dome by means of corner alcoves, or squinches, receding in three steps, a standard solution in Norman architecture and one that allows us to distinguish Sicilian examples from Byzantine, in which by contrast spherical pendentives are employed. At the centre of the mosaic with a gold background Christ Pantocrator is represented, surrounded by angels and archangels. On the floor, serving as counterpoint to the figure of the Christ, is a large *quincunx* whose *rotae* of porphyry are linked by bands in *sectilia* and *tesselatum*. The presbytery terminates in three apses and is accentuated by the notable depth of the central apse.

The passage between the two zones of the church, signalled by the triumphal arch with its two pairs of matching columns,<sup>15</sup> is clearly marked by five steps which raise up the presbytery floor above that of the aisles, as well as by the iconostasis which hides the most sacred zone of the building from the congregation. The explicit reference to Byzantine tradition, perceptible in the structure and in the decorative emphasis of the presbytery, is counterbalanced both by the Islamic component, evident as much in the overall composition as in the actual themes imparting life to the painted wooden ceiling that covers the central aisle,<sup>16</sup> and by the Latin element, legible in the basilical body of the church. The nave (see Fig. 6.5) is subdivided into five bays by four pairs of columns, most of them Corinthian, upon which stand, on tall abutments, lancet arches covered in mosaics. Their remarkable height makes it possible to admire, even from the centre of the church, the mosaic decoration which covers the entire surface of the walls of the side aisles. The floor of the central aisle is decorated with three large rectangular panels which restate the theme of the central *rota* flanked by four smaller tondi, disposed along the axes or diagonals of the rectangle. However, in their interlacing, the tondi do not generate the canonical Byzantine *quincunx* depicted in the presbytery, but are bound together by extended mosaicked ribbons which unfurl in

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<sup>15</sup> So far as the columns supporting the triumphal arch is concerned, "Corinthian and Corinthianesque capitals were specially carved, contemporary, therefore, with the years during which the chapel was built . . . let me stress the fact that these capitals represent the characteristic forms under the two Williams of Siculo-Norman decorative art." (Patrizio Pensabene, "Marmi architettonici della Cappella Palatina tra reimpiego e recupero dell'antico," in *Cappella Palatina*, pp. 137–72, the quotation is at p. 167). For an analysis of the capitals and of the architectural frameworks employed in the Cappella Palatina, the reader should refer to this same essay.

<sup>16</sup> "I have no doubt whatsoever that a workshop of artists from Cairo were mainly responsible for the original, 12th-century paintings in the nave of the Cappella Palatina" (Johns, "Le pitture del soffitto", p. 397). On the ceiling, see also Grube and Johns, *The painted ceilings*.

complex geometrical interlacings of Islamic provenance (see Fig. 6.6). The inclusion of these decorative motifs bears out this floor's independence from the so-called "Cosmatesque" style of central and southern Italy with which it is commonly associated.<sup>17</sup> The mosaic carpet of the naves of the Cappella Palatina is conceived as a combination of rectangular panels independent of the articulation of the church plan and of the rhythm of the colonnades, by contrast with the ceiling, whose cadenced rhythm of coffers and of *muqarnas* covers uninterruptedly the entire nave. In the south aisle, aligned with the main entrance and beside the royal throne, the first two floor panels are conceived in an entirely different fashion to all the others. Indeed, their design does not extend across the whole of the rectangle. Rather, the two central motives, smaller in size than their counterparts in the north aisle, are flanked by two other small panels decorated with marble tondi and bands in *tessellatum*.<sup>18</sup>

In the centre of the western wall, in place of the traditional entrance along the longitudinal axis of the chapel, is set the royal throne. It rests upon a monumental platform, raised up by means of five steps, which takes up the whole of the first bay of the nave. The larger dimensions of this bay, taller and wider than the others, and the representations of the ascent into heaven of Alexander the Great (the archetype of the sovereign) together with those of the chariots of the Sun and of the Moon depicted on the wooden ceiling, directly in line with the royal seat, consistent with the personification of the king as cosmocrator,<sup>19</sup> indicate how the placing of the throne was an integral part of the overall conception of the church.<sup>20</sup> The precise positioning of the throne, and the function of symbolic representation that the chapel was intended to fulfil, rendered

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<sup>17</sup> My own studies of Palermitan marble floors have led me to this conclusion. My analysis of the floor of the Cappella Palatina in relation to those of the churches of Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio and of S. Cataldo is in Rosa Di Liberto, "Il pavimento a tarsie marmoree e motivi figurati nella chiesa normanna di Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio in Palermo," in *Giorgio d'Antiochia. L'arte della politica in Sicilia nel XII secolo tra Bisanzio e l'Islam (Atti del Convegno Internazionale, Palermo, 19-20 aprile 2007)*, Bizantino-Sicula V (Palermo, 2009), pp. 126-53. On the floor of the Palatina see also William Tronzo, who does, however, come to the conclusion that "the guiding spirit behind the Cappella Palatina pavement was Byzantine..." (Tronzo, *The cultures of his kingdom*, pp. 29-37).

<sup>18</sup> Being an exception in the floor of the Palatina, one cannot altogether rule out the possibility that it was intentional, and that, as William Tronzo maintains, their positioning should rather be linked to the court ceremonial of saluting the king, "like the Byzantine custom of ritual bowing or *proskynesis*" (Ibid., pp. 68-78, 100,101, the quotation is at p. 100).

<sup>19</sup> Johns, "Le pitture del soffitto," p. 403.

<sup>20</sup> Tronzo, "L'architettura," p. 94; Brenk, "L'importanza e la funzione," p. 36.

it impossible to situate the door in its traditional place in the centre of the western wall and, at the same time, necessary to open up numerous entrances to the building. The two side doors which open along the western facade, in line with the aisles, remained shut in the Rogerian period, since the narthex positioned in front of the facade had not yet been completed.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, the original access to the Palatina was through four doors opened symmetrically at the far end of the longitudinal perimeter walls. Screened by a colonnade which, as is the case at present, constituted the public facade of the building,<sup>22</sup> the main entrance to the Palatina opened to the west of the southern aisle. In order to account for its position, aligned with the royal throne, one may posit a ceremonial, serving either to welcome or to salute the sovereign, staged in the area of the platform, a thesis reinforced by the interpretation of the motifs featuring in the floor panels. It seems reasonable to suppose that the other door that opens along the same wall, providing direct access to the presbytery, was reserved for the clergy.

The two points of access along the northern wall were on the other hand for the use of the king and his court. In addition, boxes or balconies located along the north wall could have offered a view from above, although here I will not address the thornier and as yet unresolved questions concerning the shape and function of such raised stations, let alone the intended use of the entire northern area of the transept. However, more generally, I reckon that one can endorse the interpretation advanced by William Tronzo, who discerns a theatrical set-up in the Cappella Palatina, whereby its north-south axis saw “the privileged spectators to the north and the personages being observed to the south.”<sup>23</sup> By the same token, the clear differentiation between the architecture and the decorative apparatus of the nave, on the one hand, and that of the sanctuary on the other, would seem to be entirely consistent in programmatic terms with the intended functions of the two zones of the church, the former being devoted to

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<sup>21</sup> William Tronzo proposes that the building work on the narthex be dated to the Wilhelmine period (Tronzo, “L’architettura,” p. 95).

<sup>22</sup> The present arrangement of the portico, with the seven recycled columns that support raised brick arcades and the mosaic depicting the glory of the Bourbons that covers the southern facade of the chapel, belong in the list of works of conversion and restoration promoted by Ferdinand II of Bourbon after his arrival in Palermo in 1838.

<sup>23</sup> As regards the question of the boxes or balconies, their dismantling in the modern period, and the intended function of the northern side of the transept, one should refer to Tronzo’s synthesis, “L’architettura,” p. 85ff. and Fig. 6.2; the quotation is at p. 94.

representation and to what was “public,” the latter to what was sacred and “secret.”

Nonetheless, the intent to glorify the sovereign found expression in the Capella Palatina in an essentially unitary atmosphere, and an interpenetration of different architectural and formal solutions was achieved, a clear indication of the fine tuning of a language that could only have occurred locally. The fascinating narrative enacted within the Cappella Palatina would not have been possible save around Roger, the first of his line to be crowned, and above all in a court boasting unusually learned intellectuals and politicians. I refer, in particular, to figures such as George of Antioch, capable of inspiring the conduct and the architectural and artistic ventures needed to prompt the Hauteville to make the leap from deft mercenaries and “fearless” conquerors to enlightened sovereigns.<sup>24</sup> In the Cappella Palatina, the paintings on the ceiling, “the most exhaustive and best preserved from the Islamic regal programme,”<sup>25</sup> exist in an extraordinary symbiosis with the dome and the mosaics with a gold background, an evocation of the purest Byzantine imperial tradition,<sup>26</sup> as well as with the plan of the nave and the vertical architectural elements (bases, columns, capitals), which are a homage to the Latin church. Indeed, the very choice of basilical type refers explicitly to the palaeochristian basilicas of Rome, and in particular, the Benedictine friars who had accompa-

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<sup>24</sup> George of Antioch was indeed the first to refer to Roger II as holy. In a private bilingual document (Greek and Arabic) from 1143, in actual fact, we read: *mawlā-nā al-malik al-mu’azzam al-qiddis*, or “Our lord, the venerable and holy king.” Annliese Nef reckons that we are concerned here with a contribution deriving from the Arabic-speaking, Christian world to which George belonged, although she also discerns a convergence here with the Byzantine conception of regal sanctity, endorsed in the Fatimid and Shi’ite world: Annliese Nef, *Conquérir et gouverner. La Sicile islamique aux XI<sup>e</sup> et XII<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Rome, 2011), p. 105ff.

<sup>25</sup> Jeremy Johns attributes all of the paintings on the ceiling of the Palatina to Fatimid workmen from Cairo, despite the fact that images derived from the Latin Christian tradition also feature. By contrast with Lev Kapitain, Johns is less inclined to acknowledge in these depictions “... the direct influence of the artistic traditions of the eastern Christian communities, amongst them those of Coptic Egypt.” Nor does this same scholar agree with Ernst Grube, who holds such paintings to be the expression of a local tradition with roots in Sicily (Johns, “Le pitture del soffitto,” pp. 388, 398).

<sup>26</sup> Whilst the iconographic and symbolic model of the mosaics in the Palatina is indubitably Byzantine in origin, Beat Brenk does not concede that there is anything “genuinely Byzantine” in the conception of the church, which is, he insists, “without either predecessors or heirs.” Indeed, with regard to the mosaics themselves, this same scholar asserts: “Stylistic analysis has not yet succeeded on the basis of reasonable and comprehensible arguments in establishing whether a mosaic has been realised by a Sicilian or a Byzantine mosaicist...” (Brenk, “L’importanza e la funzione,” pp. 30 and 48).

nied Roger during the conquest.<sup>27</sup> The same fusion was likewise realised in the marble floor of Roger II's chapel and, as we shall see, in those of Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio and of the church of San Cataldo also.

*Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio or Martorana*

*Quest'edifizio ci offrì una vista che mancan le parole a descriverla ed è forza tacerne, perché quello è il più bello monumento del mondo* (Ibn Jubayr, it., p. 162)

Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio is the private chapel within the palace of George of Antioch, first minister of Roger II from 1126. George had probably launched his career in Byzantine Syria. After a period of service at the Zirid court of al-Mahdiyya (Tunisia), he finally reached Sicily in 1108–1109 with a group of Melchites from Antioch, Mozarabs who may perhaps have been natives of al-Andalus.<sup>28</sup> Having been appointed Admiral of the kingdom, George was sent on various occasions to Cairo, in the guise of ambassador, and he has been credited with the formation and the learning needed to suggest to the new king that an Arabic administration be established in the kingdom, and to introduce artistic influences from the Islamic Mediterranean into Palermo. The Admiral's Byzantino-Islamic formation, and his prominent role at court<sup>29</sup> account for the building of a church that bears comparison with that of the king himself. The legal deed of foundation is dated to 1143 but, on the basis of a careful analysis of the inscriptions and the documents, it has been conjectured that as early

<sup>27</sup> In particular to the basilica of San Paolo fuori le mura, a church dating indeed from the Benedictine period (Pensabene, "Marmi architettonici," p. 167).

<sup>28</sup> The *de Indulciis* family ("of the Andalusians"), who came to Sicily after George, were Melchites from Antioch and natives of al-Andalus or of al-Mahdiyya: Giuseppe Mandalà, "Una famiglia di marmorari arabo-cristiani nella Palermo normanna e sveva (sec. XII–XIII)," in *Id.* and Marcello Moscone, "Tra latini, greci e 'arabici': ricerche su scrittura e cultura a Palermo fra XII e XIII secolo," *Segno e Testo. International Journal of manuscript and text transmission* 7 (2009), 174–231, p. 182. The Melchites were a group of Arabo-Christian families who played a central role in the construction of the monarchy, within "a wider Greek milieu" (Henri Bresc, "Arabi per lingua, greci per rito: i mozarabi di Sicilia con e dopo Giorgio," in *Giorgio d'Antiochia*, pp. 263–82, p. 263). On the Mozarabs see also Henri Bresc and Annliese Nef, "Les mozarabes de Sicile (1100–1300)," in Enrico Cuzzo, Jean-Marie Martin, eds., *Cavalieri alla conquista del Sud. Studi sull'Italia normanna in memoria di Léon-Robert Ménager* (Rome-Bari, 1998), pp. 155, 156; Annliese Nef, "L'histoire des "mozarabes" de Sicile. Bilan provisoire et nouveaux matériaux," in Cyrille Aillet, Maïte Peñelas and Philippe Roisse, eds., *¿Existe una identidad mozarabe? Historia, lengua y cultura de los cristianos de al-Andalus (siglos IX–XII)* (Madrid, 2008), pp. 255–86.

<sup>29</sup> Johns, "Le pitture del soffitto," p. 395; Vivien Prigent, "L'archonte Georges, prôtos ou émir?," *Revue des études byzantines* 59 (2001), 193–207.



as 1140 the Martorana had housed the tomb of the Antiochene's mother, and that consequently it had been built and covered in mosaics before the Cappella Palatina.<sup>30</sup> This convincing proposal as regards dating implies a challenge to the widely held assumption that the Palatina had served as a model for the mosaics of the Martorana and, above all, means that the two construction sites were active during the same years. Work on the Martorana<sup>31</sup> continued until 1184, with the addition of the narthex, of the open atrium preceded by an exonarthex and, finally, of the bell-tower, the current means of access to the church<sup>32</sup> (see Fig. 6.7). According to Slobodan Ćurčić, the narthex (12.5×3.5 metres) was perhaps intended to house the tombs of George and of his wife Irene. He therefore ascribes its building to a date prior to 1151, the year of the Admiral's death. The colonnaded atrium is datable to the same period, while the construction of the exonarthex is linked to that of the bell-tower, which was supposed to be covered with a dome.<sup>33</sup>

The radical alterations introduced between the end of the 16th century and the 18th century have had a profound impact upon the appearance of the medieval building. In this span of time the Norman entrance wall (c. 1588) was demolished and the church was extended as far as the bell-tower. The original apse was likewise dismantled and replaced by a larger chapel (1680–85). Finally, the new baroque façade (1752) on the northern side of the complex has distorted the original orientation of the church.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>30</sup> On this hypothetical dating of the church, based upon documentary analysis, see the recent essay by Augusta Acconcia Longo, "Considerazioni sulla chiesa di S. Maria dell'Ammiraglio e sulla Cappella Palatina di Palermo," *Nea Rome, Rivista di ricerche bizantinistiche* 4 (2007), 267–93.

<sup>31</sup> The most exhaustive contribution to the study of the architecture of the church, and of the reconstruction of its medieval *facies*, is still that of Slobodan Ćurčić, "L'architettura della chiesa", in Ernst Kitzinger, *I mosaici di Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio a Palermo*, Istituto Siciliano di studi bizantini e neoellenici, Monumenti 3 (Palermo, 1990), pp. 27–67.

<sup>32</sup> Such structures, located beneath the floor of the Baroque church, were brought to light in the nineteenth century by Giuseppe Patricolo. The architect even turned out to have drawn the medieval walls of the church on the floor (Giuseppe Patricolo, "La chiesa di Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio in Palermo e le sue antiche adiacenze," *Archivio Storico Siciliano* n.s. II/fasc. I (1877), 18–171).

<sup>33</sup> Ćurčić, "L'architettura della chiesa;" see also Id., "Byzantine aspects of Church Towers in Norman Sicily," in *Giorgio di Antiochia*, pp. 65–85, for a hypothesis regarding the function of the upper level of exonarthex and its connection to the second floor of the bell-tower. The topmost level of the bell-tower was completely dismantled and rebuilt between 1885 and 1891. Convinced that it had originally been covered with a dome, Giuseppe Patricolo also built the tambour that was presumed to have supported it.

<sup>34</sup> The present-day aspect of the church is also due to the stylistic restoration and rescue effected by Giuseppe Patricolo from 1870 onwards. For the work of restoration see Patricolo, "La chiesa di Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio," Franco Tomaselli, *Il ritorno dei*

Despite such transformations, it is still possible to discern the original cross-in-square plan of the church of the Norman period. It is articulated in three aisles subdivided by four columns which support the central dome, the real fulcrum of the architectonic composition. On the arms of the cross are positioned barrel vaults, while the square corner bays are covered by cross-vaults. All the roofs are clad in a mosaic with a gold background which culminates in the Christ Pantocrator at the centre of the dome (see Fig. 6.8, 6.9). While such ceiling designs may call to mind Constantinopolitan examples from the Middle Byzantine period, Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio does nonetheless diverge radically from them, both on account of the overall volumetry of its structure and because of the specific architectonic solutions adopted, wholly unfamiliar in the Byzantine world. Indeed, the perimeter walls in no way reinforce the scansion of the bays, but rather wrap the interior of the church in a stereometric parallelepiped (virtually a cube 12.50 metres wide and 10.50 metres high) from which only the delicate curves of the three apses and the dome protrude. The external facades are enlivened by wide blind arches that frame three ogival windows. They were crowned by an inscription in Greek letters contained between two frames above which rose merlons with frayed borders.<sup>35</sup>

As in the Cappella Palatina and in S. Cataldo, the extradosed dome sits on two superposed tambours, the first circular and the second octagonal in form. The passage between the square at the base and the circular dome is resolved, at the corners, by means of squinches, while four windows open out on to the orthogonal axes. From the four central columns there rise up pointed arches, while the apses are flanked by fine marble colonnettes (corner columns) set into angular niches which are cut out of the protruding edges of the walls.<sup>36</sup>

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*Normanni. Protagonisti ed interpreti del restauro dei monumenti a Palermo nella seconda metà dell'Ottocento* (Palermo, 1994), pp. 79–97, figs. 20–59, to which one should also refer for the wealth of iconographic material.

<sup>35</sup> Photographs of details from the inscription are in Tomaselli, *Il ritorno dei Normanni*, figs. 45–47.

<sup>36</sup> With regard to the capitals from the Martorana, and in particular the two Corinthian capitals from the medieval period placed upon the columns in the centre of the church, which are more elegant than those to be found in the Cappella Palatina, Patrizio Pensabene notes that: "... the evident ambition to create a classicist court style which we might define as Arabo-Norman... is perceptible precisely in the capitals from the Martorana, where there coexist capitals from the Roman period almost always reworked in the foliage and in the originally missing parts and capitals contemporary with the church but clearly with the acanthus inspired by the recycled ancient exemplars." This same scholar does not rule out the possibility that these capitals had been made for the Cappella Palatina

Even the solution adopted for the transept, raised two steps higher than the floor of the aisles, in close contact with the central bay, betrays the building's independence from Constantinople, where between the *naos* and the *bema* a "transitional" space is interposed.<sup>37</sup> The architectonic structure of Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio would seem therefore to be the product of a strictly local development, evincing compelling similarities with S. Nicolò Regale of Mazara and the Santa Trinità of Delia, two Sicilian churches built in more or less the same years. The interpretation of the church floor lends weight to the same hypothesis. It consists of eleven marble panels in which there unfold eight different geometrical motifs. The majority of the designs refer to Byzantine tradition, such as the two panels with the lozenges, those with the *rotae* and, above all, the "canonical" *quincunx* positioned in the centre of the church. In front of the entrance we encounter another *quincunx*. Nonetheless, it becomes knotted up in so peculiar a fashion as to generate a design altogether independent from its prototype (see Fig. 6.10). Similar variants of the same theme also recur in the three panels from the central aisle of the Capella Palatina. By the same token, another perennial motif, namely, the eight-point star to be found on the floor of the Martorana, is interpreted in so original a manner as to be characteristic of Islamic figurative culture (see Fig. 6.6). The presence of such radical departures from the designs of Byzantine origin is borne out by geometrical analysis, which has highlighted how, in the case of these two panels, recourse was had to modules and units of measurement different from those used in all the others.

But the real novelty with respect to the virtually contemporary realisation of the Palatina lies in the introduction of figurative marble inlays within the mosaicked backgrounds. In the two panels with lozenges there feature heads of dogs, while in the central one, caliciform bowls are associated with trees of life, lions, peacocks facing one another and, in two cases, with an acrobat, the most unusual and emblematic figure on the floor (see Fig. 6.11). A theme widely attested in France, and especially in Provence, the representation of the acrobats has a Sicilian precedent in a capital in the cloister at Cefalù and was subsequently used again on a capital in the cloister at Monreale (see Fig. 6.32). The introduction of this decorative element, which is widespread in continental Europe, once

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and then donated by the sovereign himself to the Admiral's church (Pensabene, "Marmi architettonici," p. 169).

<sup>37</sup> For the specific comparisons one should refer to Ćurčić, "L'architettura della chiesa," p. 30.

again serves to show how in the Martorana a series of models have been elaborated which belie the notion that this floor is directly descended from the “cosmatesque” floors of Byzantine provenance.<sup>38</sup>

### *San Cataldo*

The church of San Cataldo (9.48 × 12.98 metres) was built in the middle decades of the 12th century. Created as a private chapel attached to a palace, it had been isolated at the end of the 19th century, following on from the stylistic restoration and rescue effected by Giuseppe Patricolo.<sup>39</sup> Although the sources never expressly name Maio of Bari, who in 1151 succeeded George of Antioch to the post of Admiral of the Kingdom, as the builder of San Cataldo, compelling clues would seem to leave us in no doubts regarding the commission. In the first place, the church arose in an area in which there were properties belonging to Maio, in the immediate vicinity of Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio. In the aftermath of his assassination, in 1160, William I conferred upon Sylvester, count of Marsico, one of the highest offices in the kingdom, and sold him the properties belonging to Maio.<sup>40</sup> In a deed from 1176, count William, Sylvester's son, declares that he has sold the houses of his father in Palermo, formerly the property of Maio, and a church *in predictis domibus constructa*.<sup>41</sup> The identification of this church with San Cataldo is rendered irrefutable by the funerary epigraph of Matilda, the daughter of Sylvester of Marsico, who had died in 1161, located along its northern wall. Strictly speaking, one cannot rule out the possibility that Sylvester could have promoted

<sup>38</sup> For an analysis of this floor I would refer the reader to Di Liberto, “Il pavimento . . . di Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio.”

<sup>39</sup> For the graphic documentation of the church, its historical and artistic context, and the history of the various restorations, one should consult Rosa Di Liberto, “La chiesa normanna di S. Cataldo a Palermo,” *Palladio* n.s. IX, n.17 (1996), 17–32 with the bibliography; for the restorations see also Tomaselli, *Il ritorno dei Normanni*, pp. 113–19, figs. 60–79, in particular fig. 64 for a detail of the inscription.

<sup>40</sup> For the historiographical sources see Ugo Falcando, *La historia o liber de Regno Sicilie e la Epistola ad Petrum Panormitane ecclesie thesaurarium*, ed. Giovan Battista Siragusa, *Fonti per la Storia d'Italia* (Rome, 1897); archival documents pertaining to the church are published by Carlo Alberto Garufi, *Catalogo illustrato del tabulario di S. Maria Nuova in Monreale* (Palermo, 1902), *Documenti per servire alla Storia di Sicilia*, 2 and by Giovan Battista Siragusa, *Il regno di Guglielmo I in Sicilia*, (second edn., Palermo, 1929), appendix.

<sup>41</sup> The document is contained in the Tabularium of the Church of Monreale since, in 1182, William II transfers the church of S. Cataldo and its properties to the diocese of Monreale. *Liber privilegiorum sancte Montis Regalis ecclesie*, Palermo 1182, giugno, XV ind. (cc. 13r B–13v). The document is published in Garufi, *Catalogo illustrato*, p. 163 and in Siragusa, *Il regno di Guglielmo I*, pp. 436–38.

the construction of the church, or its completion, prior to transferring his daughter's remains there. However, the convincing sequence of dates serving to confirm events associated with the church, amongst which one should also include the death of Sylvester himself, which took place in 1166, leads one to suppose that in 1161 the church was already built, albeit in forms that were not yet wholly completed. Furthermore, in the abovementioned document from 1176, William of Marsico in alluding to his father refers to him as the owner of the chapel and not as its builder, an achievement that he would not have failed to glory in.

Amongst the many reasons validating the attribution of the church to Maio are the dedication of the church to San Cataldo, an Apulian bishop, and its structure featuring aligned domes, something wholly exceptional in Sicily although common enough, in fact, in the district of Bari. The premature death of the Admiral also accounts for the unfinished state of the church, whose walls and domes, lacking in decoration, contrast with the exquisite floor with marble inlays.

With three aisles, a raised presbytery and an enclosed transept, the church echoes in these features the planimetric scheme of the Cappella Palatina. The structure of the sanctuary is essentially different, since its side aisles are contained within the width of the walls, whereas the central one, which is none too deep, juts out slightly from the east wall, the only element to confer a plastic sense upon the rigid parallelepiped (see Figs. 6.12, 6.13). This solution, attested in Sicily since the times of the Countship (Santa Maria a Mili S. Pietro in the territory of Messina), would be revived in the period of the Kingdom, as in the case of S. Giovanni degli Eremiti and Santa Maria Maddalena. The peculiarity of the church of S. Cataldo lies in the combination of a nave whose rhythm is dictated by four columns in the centre with an unexpected volumetric development. Three domes are placed on two superposed tambours, the first circular and the second continuous and rectilinear, and containing within itself the octagonal plans of the drum of each dome (see Figs. 6.14–15). The side aisles, which are lower, are cross-vaulted. This solution emphasises the presence of the three aligned domes whose slender forms rise above the rigid volume of the building.

There is no doubt that the model for the positioning of the domes of S. Cataldo may be traced back to the province of Bari, and to a group of Benedictine monastic churches. In particular, I would refer the reader to S. Benedetto di Coversano and to Ognissanti a Valenzano, dated to the 11th century. This latter seems to have its prototype in the little church of

Seppanibale, near Fasano, which is early medieval in origin.<sup>42</sup> S. Cataldo marks a fundamental shift in conception where Norman Sicilian floors are concerned,<sup>43</sup> not only in the development of the designs but also in the arrangement of the panels, which, for the first time, cover the entire surface of the church. In the central *quincunx*, the fulcrum of the composition, the reference to the roof is explicit: the large design, with its progression from the round to the octagonal, echoes the equivalent passage between the dome and its underlying tambour. At the same time, it accentuates the vaguely centralizing<sup>44</sup> character of the layout of the church. Before the main entrance the design unfolds as a sequence of three rectangles connected by tondi and flanked by an analogous motif on a markedly elongated rectangular base. The side aisles are covered with two panels on each side, equal and symmetrical. In one of them there is represented a crystalline interlacing generated by the eight-point star, while in the other we find three *quincunces* bound together through the interpenetration of the marble bands. The latter, in their intersecting, define the continuity of the design, which occupies the exact space that has to be filled. Furthermore, so as to emphasise the projection of the arches between the bays, we find the interweaving of tondi, alternating with lozenges in the longer rectangles, repeated seven times.

In this floor too it is easy to recognise the symbiosis between themes known in the Byzantine world and others elaborated by Islamic culture. The most obvious proof of this is constituted by the panel with the eight-point star, flanked by hexagons with triangular projections, aligned with

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<sup>42</sup> For this group of little churches in the district of Bari, the reader should refer to the bibliography in Di Liberto, "La chiesa normanna di S. Cataldo," and, in addition, to Pina Belli D'Elia, "Il romanico," in *La Puglia fra Bisanzio e l'Occidente* (Milan, 1980), pp. 125–26 and figs. 156, 157; *La Puglia*, ed. Pina Belli D'Elia, (Milan, 1987), Italia Romanica, pp. 472–77; *Ead.*, "Architetture rurali nel territorio della Puglia centrale: persistenze e nuove proposte di indagini," in Giuliano Volpe and Maria Tuchiano, eds., *Paesaggi e insediamenti rurali in Italia meridionale fra tardo antico e alto medioevo (Atti del primo Seminario sul Tardoantico e l'Altomedioevo in Italia Meridionale, Foggia, 12–14 febbraio 2004)* (Bari, 2005), pp. 377–85; Gioia Bertelli, *Cultura longobarda nella Puglia altomedievale. Il tempio di Seppanibale presso Fasano* (Molfetta-Bari, 1994); on the structures with aligned domes in Apulia: Rossella De Cadilhac, *L'arte della costruzione in pietra. Chiese di Puglia con cupole in asse dal secolo XI al XVI* (Rome, 2008).

<sup>43</sup> Rosa Di Liberto, "Il pavimento a tarsie marmoree della chiesa normanna di S. Cataldo in Palermo," in Rosa Maria Carra Bonacasa and Federico Guidobaldi, eds., *Atti del IV Colloquio dell'Associazione Italiana per lo Studio e la Conservazione del Mosaico (Palermo, 6–13 dicembre 1996)* (Ravenna, 1997), pp. 343–64.

<sup>44</sup> Di Stefano-Krönig, p. 60.

the southern entrance to the church (see Fig. 6.16). The rhythm of the composition fans out in every direction, based upon a relationship of three modules that highlights the centres of all the main geometrical patterns: the eight-point star, the hexagon and the small square. The placing of these squares along the diagonals of the composition unties the geometrical “knot” formed by the intersection of the patterns, and makes it possible to re-present the schema ad infinitum. This characteristic betrays the Islamic provenance of the design<sup>45</sup> (see Figs. 6.17–18). Furthermore, other technical details lend weight to the notion that the floor was indeed the work of a single workshop. Indeed, both in the designs following Byzantine tradition and in those of Islamic inspiration one may trace the recurrence of one and the measurement, whether in the strips of white marble or in the bands in *tessellatum*, and of the same motifs in the mosaiced backgrounds.

The floor of S. Cataldo may therefore be described as the outcome of a unitary conception, the product of a workshop by then capable of handling in an original and coordinated fashion themes of quite diverse inspiration.

THE “ISLAMIC QUESTION:” THE PALACES OF THE KINGS  
(FAVARA OR MAREDOLCE, THE ZISA, THE CUBA, THE TORRE PISANA)

The extradosed domes, the epigraphic bands crowning the edifices, the ogival arches and the actual articulation of surfaces and volumes have given rise to the widespread conviction that Islamic architecture had exercised a direct influence upon the Norman. The artistic production characteristic of the Sicily of the 11th and 12th centuries, having no equivalent in any other region of the Mediterranean, has therefore long been defined as Arabo-Norman.

The shortcomings of this definition emerge once one reflects upon the fact that it is precisely the palaces of the kings and, more particularly,

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<sup>45</sup> I have compared this panel to the *minbar* from the Great Mosque of Marrakesh, dated to the years 1125–30, and chosen from amongst the numerous examples in the Maghrebian area on the grounds that the geometrical-compositional theme informing its decoration employs the same basic patterns as the panel from San Cataldo (Di Liberto, “Il pavimento . . . di S. Cataldo,” p. 354); cf. Xavier Barral I Altet, *Le décor du pavement au Moyen Âge. Les mosaïques de France et d’Italie*, Collection de l’École Française de Rome, 429 (Rome, 2010), pp. 176, 194–195, who denies an Islamic influence upon the Sicilian patterns and proposing a cosmatesque origin, even if he notices the “particularity” of the Sicilian floors.

the “solaces” built outside the city walls, “profane” buildings created for the purposes of amusement, that have been regarded as the most obvious expression of Islamic culture. The question at issue does indeed turn upon the chronology of such buildings, all of them built right in the middle of the Norman period, and I would maintain that it is no longer justified to invoke in their case an “Arab” origin *tout court*, without our having ascertained the real impact of Islamic architectural culture in Sicily, in the period between 827 and 1061 (Islamic domination).<sup>46</sup> One cannot help noting the glaring contrast between the picture that emerges from the analysis of the literary sources<sup>47</sup> and the fact that no construction, either civil or religious, can with confidence be ascribed to the two centuries of Muslim domination.<sup>48</sup> Although the evidence belies the presence in Islamic Sicily of a monumental architecture, some examples, albeit very few in number, seem to confirm the image of the city evoked by a reading of the Arabo-muslim travellers. The stone architectonic elements from the Islamic period<sup>49</sup>—not least the columns and the decorative members—

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<sup>46</sup> The historical relationships between Sicily and the Islamic world have been investigated by Nef, *Conquérir et gouverner*; for an account of Islamic Palermo, see the contributions by Anliese Nef and Alessandra Bagnera to the present volume, together with the bibliographies.

<sup>47</sup> I refer, in particular, to the descriptions of Palermo in the 10th century handed down to us by Ibn Ḥawqal in *BAS* it., 1: 12, 17–24 and by al-Muqaddasī it., pp. 668–75. For an interpretation of these sources with regard to the medieval walls of the quarter of the Kalsa in Palermo, the ancient Fatimid citadel of al-Khālīṣa, one should consult the careful study by Pezzini, “Un tratto della cinta muraria.”

<sup>48</sup> Some well-known buildings, traditionally attributed to the Islamic period, have been subject to a process of revision, evidence being marshalled in almost every case that ties them to the Norman period. The so-called “Sala Araba,” in the complex of S. Giovanni degli Eremiti in Palermo, has been dated to the period of the Countship (see note 75). The identification of a mosque in the so-called “Sala Ipostila,” beneath the cappella dell’Incoronata in the vicinity of the Cathedral of Palermo, has been surrounded by more doubts than certainties: Giuseppe Bellafore, *Dall’Islam alla Maniera. Profilo dell’architettura siciliana dal IX al XVI secolo* (Palermo, 1975), p. 67; Id., *Architettura in Sicilia nelle età islamica e normanna (827–1194)* (Palermo, 1990), p. 124. The structures from the enclosure-fortress of Mazzallacar have for their part actually been dated to the modern period. The contrary opinion is held by Anna Maria Schmiedt, “La fortezza di Mazzallacar,” *Bollettino d’Arte* LVII (1972), 92–93 and Di Stefano-Krönig, p. 136; Ferdinando Maurici, *Castelli medievali in Sicilia. Dai bizantini ai normanni* (Palermo, 1992), p. 84, argues for a much later date. Finally, even the mosque brought to light in Segesta has itself been dated to the Norman period: Alessandra Molinari, *Il castello e la moschea (scavi 1989–1995)*, Segesta. Ricerche storico-archeologiche, II (Palermo, 1997), pp. 95–98. On the so-called “Arab Baths” of Cefalà Diana the reader should consult a multi-disciplinary study, in which the architectonic investigation of the building was entrusted to the present author: Alessandra Bagnera and Anliese Nef, eds, *Storia di un complesso termale siciliano: i bagni di Cefalà dall’epoca islamica al XX secolo*, in press.

<sup>49</sup> The aedile inscriptions, engraved upon quoins of squared off stone, testify to the labours of stone-cutters in 10th-century Sicily. One of these, which bears the name of



are documents which restore to us an image of the island wholly consistent with the contemporary architectonic achievement in the Islamic world, just as the ceramic and numismatic finds from various excavations<sup>50</sup> seem to underscore the island's integration into the broader context of the Islamic culture of the Mediterranean basin.

The clearest confirmation of the existence of a patrimony in building styles common to the two cultures is provided by the early utilisation, in a European context, of the ogival arch, which anticipates one of the cardinal statical solutions permitting the surpassing of Romanesque architecture and its evolution towards the Gothic.<sup>51</sup> The arch with two centres is employed by Egyptian Fatimid architecture, and in Ifrīqiya in examples datable to between the 10th and the 11th century.<sup>52</sup> These latter were the regions from which some of the Islamic conquerors of the island originally came. There is therefore no cause to suppose that they had not reverted in Sicily to forms and techniques associated with the building traditions of their countries of origin. In any case, the absence of architectural evidence means that it is not possible fully to grasp whether it is indeed the case,

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the Fatimid caliph al-Mu'izz, is from Termini Imerese, and is dated to 951–961. One fragment would seem to come from the walls of the Islamic citadel of al-Khālīṣa, and another inscription, known only from drawings, was engraved upon the quoins of the tower of Baich in Palermo. These attestations prove that towers made of squared off quoins were built in 10th-century Palermo. See Michele Amari, *Le epigrafi arabe di Sicilia trascritte, tradotte e illustrate* (Palermo, 1875); Bartolomeo Lagumina, "Sicilia. Palermo. Iscrizione edile araba," *Notizie degli Scavi* (1899), 305–306; Umberto Scerrato, "Arte islamica in Italia," in Gabrieli-Scerrato, p. 282; Roberta Giunta, "L'epigrafe in arabo di Termini Imerese," in Alessandra Bagnera, ed., *Archeologia dell'Islam in Sicilia, Catalogo della mostra Islam in Sicilia. Un giardino fra due civiltà* (Gibellina, 2012), pp. 16–19.

<sup>50</sup> For a picture of the finds and material evidence from the Islamic period one should refer in the last analysis to the volume edited by Alessandra Bagnera cited in note 49.

<sup>51</sup> After having visited the Zisa, Viollet-le-Duc in fact emphasised this peculiarity of Sicilian architecture and claimed, in essence, that the origin of Gothic was to be sought in Sicily: Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, *Lettres d'Italie 1836–1837 adressées à sa famille annotées par Geneviève Viollet-le-Duc* (Paris, 1971), p. 58. For a detailed analysis of the arches employed in Norman architecture, and, in particular, in the Cathedral of Cefalù, see Vladim Zoric', "Il cantiere della cattedrale di Cefalù ed i suoi costruttori," in Roberto Calandra, ed., *La Basilica Cattedrale di Cefalù. Materiali per la conoscenza storica e il restauro* (Palermo, 1989), fasc. I, pp. 252–286; on the disputed origin of the pointed arch in Sicilian Norman architecture: Ciotta, *La cultura architettonica*, pp. 23–61.

<sup>52</sup> Simply by way of example, we shall cite the mosque of Qayrawān, founded in the Aghlabid epoch and transformed in the 10th century, during the reign of the Fatimids and the mosques of Cairo of Ibn Tulūn and of al-Hākīm (990–1013). See Oleg Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art*, ed. it. *Arte islamica. La formazione di una civiltà* (Milan, 1989), figs. 18–20, 64, 65, 67; Keppel, A. C. Creswell, *A short account of early muslim architecture*, 1958, reprinted in Beirut 1968, voll. II; Id., *The Muslim Architecture in Egypt*, vol. I, *Ikhshids and Fatimids, A.D. 939–1171*, pp. 65–106.

as I believe, that such contributions had caused the rise of a local building tradition, responsible in its turn for the formation of the new idiom of the Norman period, or if the Sicilian achievements of the mid-12th century were not rather indebted to alien models, imported deliberately by skilled workmen.

The sole element of novelty offering some challenge to the overly static picture outlined above would be constituted by an archaeological excavation conducted at Maredolce, or Favara, which has brought to light, for the very first time, a planimetrically delineated building, stratigraphically dated to between the 10th and the 11th century. Further confirmation of these preliminary elements would be an important tessella for those of us engaged in the attempt to “recast the history of architecture in the Arab, pre-Norman period, in Sicily.”<sup>53</sup>

#### *Favara or Maredolce*

The site took the name of the spring (*fawwara*) of sweet water which gushed forth a few hundred metres upstream from the palace. On the basis of what is recounted by Ibn Jubayr in his chronicle of his journey of 1184, Michele Amari had earlier maintained that the castle was Islamic in origin, and had ascribed its foundation to the Kalbid emir Ja‘far (997–1019).<sup>54</sup> Nonetheless, no element has so far substantiated this thesis, indeed, both of the other sources from the Norman period,<sup>55</sup> and the evidence from the architecture of the palace and the study of the stonemasons’ marks

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<sup>53</sup> I wish to extend my heartfelt thanks to Stefano Vassallo, director of the archaeological section of the “Soprintendenza ai Beni Culturali di Palermo,” for his generosity in permitting me to read his still unpublished article and to include in the present contribution a succinct synthesis of the results of the excavation conducted at Maredolce between 2011 and 2012, in the context of the work of restoration. For a more detailed account, the reader is referred to Stefano Vassallo, “E le pietre restituiscono le vestigia del castello arabo,” *Kalós*, 3 (2012), 23–25. See also Id. and Emanuele Canzoneri, “Gli insediamenti extra urbani a Palermo in età islamica: nuovi dati da Maredolce,” contribution presented to the Congress *Le processus d’islamisation en Sicile et en Méditerranée centrale* (Palermo, 8–10 novembre 2012), in press.

<sup>54</sup> “About a mile along the road that leads to the capital, there is another, similar castle, which is called Qasr Gafar . . . within which there is a fish farm fed by a spring.” The resemblance to which Ibn Jubayr alludes here is with the neighbouring Qasr Sa‘d, which he refers to the Muslim period (*BAS* it., 1: 154–55, note 47). Michele Amari’s attribution has been seconded by Silvana Braidà, “Il castello di Favara. Studi di restauro,” *Architetti di Sicilia*, 1/5–6 (1965), 27–34; Di Stefano-Krönig, p. 96 and Umberto Scerrato, “Arte normanna e archeologia islamica in Sicilia,” in Mario D’Onofrio, ed., *I Normanni popolo d’Europa 1030–1200*, Catalogo della mostra di Roma (Venice, 1994), p. 340.

<sup>55</sup> Romualdo Salernitano, *Cronicon*, ed. Carlo Alberto Garufi, *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores VII* (Città di Castello, 1935), pp. 232–233; Falcando, *La historia*, p. 87.

engraved on the quoins, suggested rather an attribution of the complex to Roger II.<sup>56</sup> Recent archaeological investigations have unearthed some courses, realised with large stone quoins, pertaining to a structure from the Islamic period upon which the Norman building would be aligned with its perimeter walls, following faithfully the earlier line, at any rate on three sides (south, west and north). The archaeologists have also made the important new discovery that, in the Islamic period, only a small stream fed by the waters from the spring flowed in the area near the fort.

According to scholars, Roger II's palace was therefore the outcome of a rebuilding, designed to turn what had been fortifications pure and simple into a royal residence<sup>57</sup> (see Fig. 6.19–20). In its immediate vicinity there was built a large artificial pond dominated by a little island covered in luxuriant vegetation, expressly carved out of the surrounding rock. The forbidding external surfaces of the palace feature tiers of large multiple arches which, in some cases, are blind, while in others they frame the windows. The interior of the building was radically recast, with the various rooms being disposed around a grand porticoed courtyard covered with cross-vaults. The same phase of building probably witnessed the erection, in the north wing of the palace, of the chapel dedicated to saints Philip and James, and the hall opposite, strongly characterised by a vaulted alcove, whose decoration is reminiscent of those in the Scibene, another palace in the vicinity of Palermo, now in a seriously dilapidated condition, whose dating is controversial.<sup>58</sup> The chapel, which has just the one nave, is covered with two cross-vaults which rise up from very elongated corbels. The division between nave and presbytery is entrusted to two stretches of wall whose position leads me to posit the presence of an iconostasis which repeated its alignment. At the centre of the transept, terminating in three apses contained within the thickness of the walls,

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<sup>56</sup> On the basis of an examination of the masons' marks, Vladimir Zoric' has attributed the building of the castle and of the huge artificial pond of Maredolce to Roger II: Vladimir Zoric', "Alcuni risultati di una ricerca nella Sicilia Normanna: i marchi dei lapidisti quale mezzo per la datazione dei monumenti e la ricostruzione dei loro Cantieri," in *Actes du Vle Colloque International de Glyptographie de Samoëns* (Braine-le-Château, 1989), pp. 567–649, spec. pp. 584–86.

<sup>57</sup> The palace, still recalled in Charles of Anjou's day as a magnificent place of pleasure, had in fact shed its residential function by the end of the 13th century, as has been confirmed by the excavation of the western portico of the courtyard, in which five ovens, for the firing of pottery, have been discovered.

<sup>58</sup> Giuseppe Spatrisano, *La Zisa e lo Scibene di Palermo* (Palermo, 1982), pp. 63–98; Wolfgang Krönig, *Il castello di Caronia in Sicilia* (Rome, 1977), pp. 108, 110; Di Stefano-Krönig, pp. 101–103, plates CLIV–CLVI.

there rises up a “Norman” extradosed dome, wholly analogous indeed, in its opening out from the square at the base to the circumference, to all the Palermitan examples cited above. On the exterior, a projecting cornice crowns the spherical vault, as happens in the palazzo del Parco and in countless other Sicilian examples.

### *La Zisa*

*Questo è il paradiso terrestre che si apre agli sguardi. / Questi è il Mosta'izz e questo [palagio] l'Aziz* (from an epigraph in the palace, translated in Amari, *Le epigrafi arabe di Sicilia*)

Surrounded by fertile gardens, embellished by fountains and large ponds, the *sollatium* of the Zisa is one of the suburban residences built inside the park of the Genoardo.<sup>59</sup> Datable to between 1164 and c. 1175, its construction has been ascribed to the Norman kings William I and II. The Zisa derives its name from the epithet al-‘Azīz (noble, splendid), a designation employed in the Arabic epigraphic band using cursive characters that decorated the main entrance to the central hall on the ground floor.<sup>60</sup> In this same inscription the sovereign is defined as al-Musta‘izz (eager for glory), a term used to identify William II, who may therefore be assumed to have completed the work of his predecessor.

The building is a stereometric parallelepiped on a rectangular plan (36.36×19.60 metres, height 25 metres) from which project two short avant-corps at the centre of the shorter sides; against it there lay a narrow block, a vaulted gallery linking it to a small chapel dedicated to the Holy Trinity.<sup>61</sup> As at Maredolce, the single aisle of the church is separated from the presbytery by two short stretches of wall. The passage between the two zones is further emphasised here by two steps. The side apses are barely outlined at all and are incorporated into the thickness of the

<sup>59</sup> On the Zisa see the monographs by: Spatrisano, *La Zisa e lo Scibene*; Giuseppe Caronia, *La Zisa di Palermo. Storia e restauro* (Palermo, 1982); Ursula Staacke, *Un palazzo normanno a Palermo. La Zisa. La cultura musulmana negli edifici dei Re* (Ital. trans. Palermo, 1991); Giuseppe Bellafore, *La Zisa di Palermo* (Palermo, 2001). See also Adolph Goldschmidt, “Die normannischen Königspaläste in Palermo,” *Zeitschrift für Bauwesen* 48 (1898), 542–90; Di Stefano-Krönig, pp. 103–108; Giuseppe Bellafore, *Architettura in Sicilia nelle età islamica e normanna (827–1194)* (Palermo, 1990), pp. 149–151; Giovanna Ventrone Vassallo, “La Sicilia islamica e postislamica dal IV/X al VII/XIII secolo,” in Giovanni Curatola, ed., *Eredità dell’Islam. Arte islamica in Italia, Catalogo della mostra di Venezia (30 ottobre 1993–30 aprile 1994)* (Milan, 1993) pp. 183–193; Hans-Rudolph Meier, “I palazzi residenziali di Palermo,” in *I Normanni popolo d’Europa*, pp. 221–27; Ciotta, *La cultura architettonica*, pp. 235–45.

<sup>60</sup> Amari, *Le epigrafi arabe* (Palermo, 1875).

<sup>61</sup> Spatrisano, *La Zisa e lo Scibene*, p. 29.

walls, whereas the central one, which is emphasised by two small corner columns, protrudes slightly on to the external perimeter. Even in this case, at the centre of the transept there is positioned a “Norman” dome; the geometrical gap between the rectangular space of the presbytery and the square space of the dome is resolved by means of a flying structure decorated with *muqarnas*.<sup>62</sup>

The facades of the Zisa, enlivened by large arches, culminated in a epigraph (see Fig. 6.21). Freighted with symbolic and decorative values, the practice of affixing an inscription to crown a building becomes an expression of the status of rich patrons, regardless of the actual function of the building or of the language employed in the text. This point is confirmed by the Baths of Cefalà Diana, the Cuba, the church of the Martorana, in which the choice of Greek has to do with admiral George of Antioch, and the church of San Cataldo, where the use of Latin, which is equally original, would seem to be a tribute to the origins of Maio of Bari.<sup>63</sup>

In the interior of the palace, which is laid out on three levels, all the rooms are arranged in a symmetrical fashion in relation to the minor axis of the block, and gravitate around a central hall (see Fig. 6.22). On the ground floor, a vestibule occupying the entire length of the building offers access to the Fountain Room. This latter rises volumetrically to the height of two floors and is characterised by alcoves formed from the thickness of the walls and decorated by *muqarnas*. The room above, which repeats the same planimetric structure, was open to the elements and collected rainwater by means of an *impluvium* in marble. A system of vents built from the thickness of the internal dividing walls, and of ventilation shafts located in the side turrets, guaranteed a continuous circulation of air, ensuring pleasant conditions even on the sultriest days.

The influence of Islamic customs and architecture is apparent both in the general structure of the Zisa and in the relationship with water, channelled into ponds by means of impressive feats of hydraulic engineering. It gushed into the entrance hall and from there, across an inclined plane of

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., figs. 62–66.

<sup>63</sup> The solution adopted in the Sicilian buildings is of undoubted Islamic provenance. The minaret of the mosque of Sfax (Tunisia), at whose summit, richly decorated, is placed an inscription in Arabic characters, is famous. The mosque was built in the Aghlabid period but transformed from the end of the 10th century onwards. Lucien Golvin, *Essai sur l'architecture religieuse musulmane*, t. III, Paris, 1974; Georges Marçais, Lucien Golvin, *La Grande Mosquée de Sfax* (Tunis, 1960). The practice of placing crenellations at the top of buildings was still more widespread in the Islamic world, see Georges Marçais, *Manuel d'art musulman. L'architecture. Tunisie, Algérie, Maroc, Espagne, Sicile, I* (Paris, 1926), p. 193.

marble decorated with furrows in a zig-zag pattern, flowed into an elegant system of fountains and culminated in the great fish-pond in front of the palace, where there was a little pavilion.

Some hold the Zisa to be testimony to the skills of local Islamic workmen operating alongside those coming from the Maghreb.<sup>64</sup> The noteworthy concern with height, the rigorous approach to internal structure with its emphasis upon the public rooms and its concern to hide the private apartments from view, and the use of cross-vaults to carry floors and terraces are all architectonic features that have often been held to be reminiscent of Maghrebian palaces, whether Hammadid (Qal'a Banī Ḥammād: ground floor of the tower of Dār al-Manār), Zirid (palace of Zirī at Ashīr, 947) or Fatimid (Tunis: palace of the Banū Khūrasān).<sup>65</sup> However, in the second half of the 12th century, the majority of the above solutions were not entirely alien to the local culture; indeed, to judge by the case of Maredolce, they had already been tried and tested during the reign of Roger II, thereby helping to forge a new language which has imparted so particular a character to Sicilian architectonic achievements.

The Zisa underwent radical alterations after 1635, when the palace became the residence of the Spanish family of the Sandoval. They adapted the Norman edifice to the requirements of the period, constructing a grand staircase offering access to the upper floors, covering the three open courtyards with pavilions and the side turrets with pyramids. After the collapse, in 1971, of the north wing, the building was subjected to an impressive, though controversial restoration, led by Giuseppe Caronia, who has reconstructed the vaults and the original volumes employing reinforced cement, left untreated, so as to render his improvements immediately recognisable.

### *La Cuba*

A place of wonders, so famous that Boccaccio set one of the stories from the Decameron there (V, 6), the Cuba<sup>66</sup> was built by William II, and probably completed in 1180. The name of the sovereign who commissioned it,

<sup>64</sup> Staacke, *Un palazzo normanno*, p. 166.

<sup>65</sup> Lucien Golvin, *Islamic Architecture in North Africa* (London, 1976); Id., *Recherches archéologiques à Qal'a des Banu Hammad* (Paris, 1965); Id., "Le palais de Zirī à Achīr," *Ars Orientalis* 6 (1966), 47s; Georges Marçais, *L'architecture musulmane d'Occident. Tunisie, Algérie, Maroc, Espagne et Sicile* (Paris, 1955).

<sup>66</sup> The building seems to derive its name from the term for "dome," but opinions differ markedly over this etymology.

“remarkable amongst the kings of the earth,”<sup>67</sup> and the date, are recorded in the Arabic epigraph in cursive characters that crowns the building, a parallelepiped on a rectangular base (31.15×16.80 metres; height, 16 metres) from which four little avant-corps protrude, in alignment with the orthogonal axes. The considerable height of its base (c. 3.50 metres) and the fragments of *cocciopesto* covering it have bolstered the notion that the building was surrounded by the waters of an artificial lake and connected to the terraferma by means of a footbridge.<sup>68</sup> The Cuba is arranged on only one level, which gravitates around a central space (see Fig. 6.23). On the inside of this court, about 2 metres away from its perimetral walls, the traces of four columns placed at the corners of a square have been discovered. In the middle there was a basin of water in the form of an eight-point star. There has been a long and fruitless debate as to whether this space was uncovered or, rather, covered by a dome supported by the columns. The most convincing argument, in my opinion, is that of Susanna Bellafiore, who, invoking the principles of statics, denies that columns of that diameter could support so wide a dome.<sup>69</sup> Her thesis fits well with the plan of the Cuba, indubitably a pavilion rather than a proper residence, and is lent further credence by the comparison with the second floor of the Zisa, in which four columns delimit the uncovered courtyard. On the sides of the atrium, along the major axis of the Cuba, two groups of rooms are symmetrically positioned. To the east there is a single rectangular space with three alcoves, one of them coinciding with an avant-corps, while the other two are built from the width of the wall. The entrance is by way of three doors, the central one being the widest. On the opposite side, there is a monumental square hall, and it too features three alcoves. Its ceremonial function, as a place fit to receive the king, is evident from its entrance, accentuated by an imposing arch which, in all probability, stood out from two pairs of columns on each side. The hall is separated from the perimetral walls by two corridors which permit

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<sup>67</sup> The translation of the fragment from the epigraph in verse from the Cuba is by Umberto Scerrato, “L’epigrafia,” in Gabrieli-Scerrato, p. 302.

<sup>68</sup> Ursula Staacke disagrees, reckoning that the cladding in *opus signinum* derived from modern troughs built between the 19th and the 20th century, when the Cuba was turned into a barracks (Staacke, *Un palazzo normanno*, p. 162, 163 and note 292).

<sup>69</sup> Susanna Bellafiore, *La Cuba di Palermo* (Palermo, 1984); her thesis is accepted by Di Stefano-Krönig, pp. 109–110 and by Staacke, *Un palazzo normanno*, p. 165. Setting aside the 19th-century studies, those rallying to the hypothesis of a dome covering the central room do, however, include: Vincenzo Lojacono, “L’organismo costruttivo della Cuba alla luce degli ultimi scavi,” *Palladio* n.s. III (1953), 1–6, p. 5; Giuseppe Caronia and Vittorio Noto, *La Cuba di Palermo (arabi e normanni nel XII secolo)* (Palermo, 1988), p. 198.

a connection with the exterior. The modulation of the facades is entirely analogous with that described for the Zisa, but in the case of the Cuba the windows are open where they correspond to the single level of the pavilion, whereas between the arches numerous blind windows piled up upon several levels have been delineated.

*The Torre Pisana in the Palazzo dei Normanni*

The Torre Pisana,<sup>70</sup> together with the Gioaria and the Cappella Palatina, is amongst the few structures that retained their pronounced Norman imprint after the upheavals occurring at Roger II's *Palatium Novum*, above all between the 16th and the 17th century (see Fig. 6.24). The Torre Pisana epitomises the character, distinctly military, of an impregnable bulwark, though it also has the residential function typical of the northern European *donjon*. The penetration of this fortification system into Sicily is borne out by the examples of Adrano, Paternò and Motta Sant'Anastasia.<sup>71</sup> However, in the Torre Pisana one may discern obvious ichnographic features, along with volumetric ones, which one would stand no chance of seeing in areas of the western world that had not been inflected by the great Islamic architectural tradition where it was grafted on to the Byzantine one. The ground plan of the keep (c. 20 metres wide) is delineated by a double perimeter wall on the inside of which are laid down communication trenches for the garrison (see Fig. 6.24–25). Such a double wall is clearly reminiscent of Islamic examples from the 11th century, in particular of the *donjon* al-Manār of the Qal'a Banī Ḥammād (see Fig. 6.26). In the Sicilian context, the Torre Pisana has a chronologically convincing precedent in the facade of the *ecclesia munita* of Cefalù (1131), whose towers, erected in order to exercise control over the surrounding territory, feature the same planimetric structure.<sup>72</sup> Continuity in building style is evinced by the same solution being reproduced later during the construction of the Wilhelmine cathedral of Monreale (1172).

<sup>70</sup> In the absence of specific studies one should refer to Krönig, *Il castello di Caronia*, pp. 99–125; Di Stefano-Krönig, pp. 44–55; Roberto Calandra "Il complesso monumentale," in Id., ed., *Palazzo dei Normanni* (Palermo, 1991), pp. 10–50; Ciotta, *La cultura architettonica*, pp. 215–16, plate XIV; Maria Andaloro, ed., *Il Palazzo Reale di Palermo* (Rimini, 2011).

<sup>71</sup> For these *donjon* see: Rosa Di Liberto, "Architetture fortificate siciliane dell'XI–XII secolo: gli impianti a recinto e i loro sistemi difensivi," in Patrizio Pensabene, ed., *Piazza Armerina. Villa del Casale e la Sicilia tra tardo antico e medioevo*, *Studia archaeologica* 175 (Rome, 2010), pp. 241–58, with a bibliography at note 64.

<sup>72</sup> Lucien Golvin, *Le Magrib central à l'époque des Zirides* (Paris, 1957); Zoric', "Il cantiere," pp. 93–340, p. 169.



La Torre Pisana is built on three floors. The ground floor houses the so-called Treasury, an austere room, strictly watched through loopholes by those on guard duty who patrolled around the ambulatory. The residential areas, which had strongly symbolic connotations, were set up on the first floor. The central zone is occupied by a square hall, and is ringed by two ambulatories disposed upon two superposed levels. The central space, however, has a double height, that is to say, equal to that of the two floors. It is covered by an impressive cross-vault, entirely clad in a mosaic which, on the basis of the few fragments that have survived, probably represented a hunting scene. The hall is overlooked by the windows of the rooms situated on the first level of the ambulatory. Amongst them there stands out one room in particular, which featured a vaulted alcove decorated with *muqarnas* in stucco. The tower looks out on to the exterior with facades modulated by large multiple arches and by elegant cornices quite unlike those deployed either in the palaces built by the two Williams or in the religious edifices.

The Torre Pisana, seemingly so distinct from the royal solaces *extra moenia*, had already elaborated architectonic and formal solutions (rooms two floors high, arches, vaulted alcoves, decoration with *muqarnas*...) which, though given different emphases, we encounter again at the Zisa and the Cuba. All the palaces of the kings would seem therefore to be linked by a *fil rouge* which obliges us to regard these edifices as the fruit of a Norman-Sicilian tradition. The boldness with which the builders recast the contributions from overseas is indicative of the creation of an architectonic language retaining only faint echoes of their archetypes, variously Islamic, Byzantine or northern European, and by now entirely lacking in any chronological valency, aside from a generic placing within the Norman period.

COMPOSITIONAL VARIANTS OF THE SAME ARCHITECTONIC LANGUAGE:

S. MARIA MADDALENA, SAN GIOVANNI DEI LEBBROSI, SAN GIOVANNI DEGLI EREMITI, SANTO SPIRITO OR DEI VESPRI, SS. TRINITÀ OR MAGIONE

The buildings examined so far represent the most complete expression of the Norman architecture of Palermo, which is also why they are the best known. In them all the distinctive features of a new architecture clearly flow together and interpenetrate. Such features may also be recognised, albeit to a lesser degree, in other buildings, which constitute the connective tissue, amongst which the more aulic examples stand out.

When, however, a paucity of sources, a lack of stratigraphic archaeological excavations and of specific architectonic studies are associated with the absence of outstanding decorative motifs and with intrusive intervention in the guise of stylistic restoration or of rescue, it is no surprise to discover that some of these buildings are considered to be of scant intrinsic interest, and are therefore virtually ignored by scholars. This is the case with Santa Maria Maddalena, the evaluation of which still relies upon the surveys and study by Mario Guiotto,<sup>73</sup> carried out around the middle of the last century. This small church was probably built between 1184 and 1186 in an area in which there had earlier been a chapel (1130?), *Ecclesiae Matrici contigua* and, precisely because of this contiguity, this latter was demolished (1184) as work on the Cathedral proceeded. Its ground plan, with four columns at the centre, and the stereometric shell of its walls, recalls the example of the Martorana and of S. Cataldo (see Fig. 6.27). The Maddalena does, however, differ from these latter churches, as regards the position of its dome, at the centre of the transept, and its strongly accentuated verticality encountered also at the Magione. A particular feature, in addition, is both the progressive restriction of the bays from the entrance wall onwards, itself a negation of the centric plan, and the height of the tambour of the dome, which is equal to that of the roof of the nave.

The monastery of S. Giovanni degli Eremiti was built by Roger II, and certainly before 1148, the date it is mentioned in a diploma of donation by the king himself. The complex is located in the vicinity of the Palazzo dei Normanni, close to the city walls, in an area in which earlier buildings still stood.<sup>74</sup> The importance of its foundation may also be inferred from the use of the palatine cemetery allotted to it. From the original layout there survives only the church, the small cloister lacking the roofing to the aisles, the so-called "Arab room," a room adjacent to the northern side of the church, as well as an edifice on two levels leaning against the north side

<sup>73</sup> Mario Guiotto was the Soprintendente responsible for public monuments in Western Sicily between 1942 and 1949: Mario Guiotto, "La chiesa di Santa Maria Maddalena in Palermo," *Bollettino d'Arte* 34, s. 4, n. 4 (1949), 361–67; Di Stefano-Krönig, pp. 86, 87.

<sup>74</sup> For the documentary sources and the bibliography on S. Giovanni degli Eremiti one should refer to Teresa Torregrossa, "Il complesso monastico di S. Giovanni degli Eremiti a Palermo," *Archivio Storico Messinese* 65 (1993), 15–49; Ead., "Il chiostro di San Giovanni degli Eremiti," *Storia Architettura*, 1–2 (1987), 39–54; Ead., "Le cupole della chiesa di San Giovanni degli Eremiti a Palermo: i restauri ottocenteschi," *Storia e restauro di architetture siciliane*, eds. Salvatore Boscarino and Maria Giuffrè, *Storia Architettura* n.s. 2 (Rome, 1996), pp. 81–92. See also Adele Daidone, "La cosiddetta sala araba nel complesso di S. Giovanni degli Eremiti a Palermo," *Storia Architettura* 1–2 (1987), 25–38.

of the cloister, which was apparently rebuilt at various different times (see Fig. 6.28). The church, with a single nave divided into two bays covered with domes, terminates in a projecting tri-apsidal transept, with the central apse protruding and the other two built within the thickness of the wall. The sanctuary and the *diaconicon* are surmounted by another two domes, while in alignment with the *protesis* a bell-tower culminating once again in a dome was built. The less than perfect symmetry between the two side chapels has been explained by the discovery of earlier structures whose presence affected the building of the *diaconicon*. Long reckoned to have belonged to a mosque, more recent scholarship has dated these chapels to the period of the Countship (1061–1130).<sup>75</sup> It has already been noted that the plan of the church, namely, a cross of Saint Anthony, has parallels in examples from the period of the Countship, such as S. Filippo di Demenna or Fragalà, near Frazzanò (Messina); S. Nicolò at Sciacca; S. Michele di Capogrosso at Hauteville (Palermo).<sup>76</sup> However, S. Giovanni degli Eremiti constitutes a further elaboration of such schemata, distancing itself from them both through the articulation of the volumes and, above all, through the unfamiliar arrangement of the domes, wholly detached from the symbolic value conferred upon them when they are used to cover the sanctuary or the centre of the nave.

According to an ancient historiographical tradition, the foundation of the church of San Giovanni dei Lebbrosi, outside the city walls, is attributed to Robert Guiscard, brother of the future king Roger, camped at the gates of Palermo in 1071, prior to launching the siege that would lead to the capture of the city. The church, dedicated to St. John the Baptist, took the name of the attached Ospizio dei Lebbrosi, probably built by Roger II around the middle of the 12th century. This information, inferred from a document in the *Tabularium* of the Magione, has fostered the notion, arrived at by a forced and arbitrary extrapolation from this same document,

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<sup>75</sup> In the course of his investigations, Giuseppe Patricolo had brought to light an earlier rectangular hall oriented at right angles to the *diaconicon* and divided into two aisles by five pilasters upon which sit twelve cross-vaults. The structure was preceded by a porticoed atrium which overlooked a wide courtyard enclosed by walls. Such a sequence of rooms led Patricolo to identify the structures as belonging to a mosque. Giuseppe Patricolo, "Il monumento arabo scoperto in febbraio 1882 e la contigua chiesa di S. Giovanni degli Eremiti," *Archivio Storico Siciliano* n.s. VII (1883), 170–83; Tomaselli, *Il ritorno dei Normanni*, pp. 126–35, figs. 80–104. Adele Daidone ascribes the building of the structure to the Norman period, relying upon a whole series of different arguments, amongst them the absence of any traces of the *mīhrab* on the walls of the room: Daidone, "La cosiddetta sala araba," pp. 25–38.

<sup>76</sup> Torregrossa, "Il complesso monastico," p. 21.

and on the basis of a comparison with S. Giovanni degli Eremiti, that the building of the church, or its reconfiguration, should be referred to the same period. Yet the question of the dating of San Giovanni dei Lebbrosi does nevertheless remain open.<sup>77</sup> It is, however, worth pointing out that the building of fortifications and of churches, a process well documented in the course of the conquest of Sicily, is wholly consistent with the policy adopted by the Normans of reappropriation of the territory. This policy was essentially achieved through the military control of the places conquered, but also, symbolically, through the building or reconsecration of places of Christian worship, as against the Islamic mosques.<sup>78</sup> It is no accident that military architects and both Benedictine friars who had come to Sicily in the wake of Roger and his troops made a fundamental contribution to the conquest.<sup>79</sup> Nor is it a surprise, therefore, that a church was founded upon the spot at which the siege against the capital was launched. From the architectonic point of view, S. Giovanni dei Lebbrosi has a basilical plan with three aisles, and with a non-projecting transept, which terminated in three apses (see Fig. 6.29). On the outside, the central aisle, being of a greater height, protrudes from the main body of the basilica, but it is above all the presbyterial zone that is emphasised, through a play of volumes which culminates in the dome, extradosed on a rectangular tambour, positioned in the centre of the transept.<sup>80</sup> Nothing in the church's planovolumetric articulation should be taken to contradict a dating to around the end of the 11th century. Its close resemblance to

<sup>77</sup> Di Stefano-Krönig, pp. 24–26, to whom the reader is also referred for the sources.

<sup>78</sup> After the conquest of Palermo, "the first step taken by Robert Guiscard was with a view to affirming the Christian religion: the Byzantine episcopal basilica, which in the Islamic period had been turned into a mosque, was reinstated as a place of Christian worship." The building of the church of San Pietro la Bagnara, in 1081, testifies to the building activity under way in these years; Elena Pezzini, in the present volume, p. 204 and note 45. It is also as well to recall that the construction of the cathedral of Troina is datable to between 1078 and 1080, and that a significant number of churches and cathedrals had been built during the period of the Conquest (cathedrals of Catania and of Mazara, S. Filippo di Fragalà near Frazzanò, S. Michele Arcangelo di Troina, S. Maria a Mili S. Pietro, S. Pietro di Itàla . . . in relation to which I refer the reader to Di Stefano-Krönig, pp. 3–18).

<sup>79</sup> Skilled workmen made a fundamental contribution to the Conquest of Sicily. Thus, in 1081, for the construction of the castle of Messina, Roger the Great Count *undecumque terrarum artificiosis caementariis conductis, fundamenta castelli, turresque apud Messanam jacens, aedificare coepit*. Likewise, for the construction of the Cathedral of Troina (1079), Roger *coementarios conducens, undecumque aggregat: Gaufredi Malaterrae, De rebus gestis Rogerii Calabriae et Siciliae comitis et Roberti Guiscardii ducis fratris eius*, ed. Ernesto Pontieri (Bologna, 1928), *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, 2, V, I, III, 32, p. 77 and III, 19, p. 68.

<sup>80</sup> The bell-tower in the middle of the facade is the outcome of a work of restoration dating to the last century, between 1925 and 1930.

the Messinian churches of Santa Maria di Mili S. Pietro and S. Pietro in Itála, built during the years of the Conquest, has already been emphasised. An admittedly weak indication of an early dating for S. Giovanni dei Lebbrosi could lie in the use of masonry pilasters, without bases and capitals. The absence of marble columns, a particularly valuable building material, normally recycled and for the most part found in places far from Sicily,<sup>81</sup> could be explained in terms of economies adopted on the construction sites, in the years preceding the high season of Rogerian construction, when marbles from many different sources would have reached Palermo. Be this as it may, in the re-entrant corners of the apses small marble columns with elegant capitals were placed, amongst them an example with an inscription in Arabic characters.

A different meaning attaches to the absence of marble columns and architectonic frameworks in the church of Santo Spirito or “of the Vespers” (see Fig. 6.30), it too erected outside the walls. Here their replacement with their equivalents made of masonry could have something to do with the observance of the austere rule of St. Benedict, which imposed rigour and sobriety. Erected by the archbishop of Palermo Walter *proto-familiarios* between 1172 and 1178, the church and the attached monastery were in fact entrusted to the Cistercian friars of the Calabrian monastery of Sambucina.<sup>82</sup> The church, which was consecrated in 1179, is commonly known as “of the Vespers,” in memory of the anti-Angevin revolt of 1282, which erupted on that very spot.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Regarding the columns and the architectonic frameworks of the Sicilian Norman churches, and the issues concerning their provenance, the workmen, recycling and reworking: Pensabene, “Marmi architettonici” and Id., “Contributo per una ricerca sul reimpiego e il ‘recupero’ dell’Antico nel Medioevo. Il reimpiego nell’architettura normanna,” *Rivista dell’Istituto Nazionale d’Archeologia e Storia dell’Arte* III, XIII (1990), 5–118.

<sup>82</sup> Di Stefano-Krönig, pp. 84–86; Francesco Tomaselli, “Il monastero cistercense della Trinità di Palermo: una fondazione anomala,” in Carmela Angela Di Stefano, *et al.*, “Palermo ricerche archeologiche nel complesso della SS. Trinità (Magione),” *Archeologia Medievale* 24 (1997), 283–310; Giulia Davì and Santina Grasso, “Introduzione all’architettura Cistercense in Sicilia. La chiesa di S. Spirito e della SS. Trinità a Palermo,” in *I Cistercensi e il Lazio. Atti delle giornate di studio dell’Istituto di Storia dell’Arte dell’Università di Roma (17–21 maggio 1977)* (Rome, 1978), pp. 99–110; Teresa Torregrossa, *La chiesa di Santo Spirito a Palermo* (Florence, 2000); Francesco Tomaselli, “Palermo. La SS. Trinità della Magione,” in Carmela Angela Di Stefano and Antonio Cadei, eds., *Federico e la Sicilia dalla terra alla corona. Archeologia e architettura*, (Syracuse, 2000), 2, pp. 627, 647.

<sup>83</sup> At the beginning of the 1570s, church and monastery were assigned to Olivetani monks when their own church, Santa Maria dello Spasimo, was incorporated into one of the ramparts of the new walls of Palermo. The destruction of the monastery dates to 1783, when the area was earmarked as a public cemetery; the bell-tower and its facade of the

The other Cistercian abbey, that of SS. Trinità or Magione (see Fig. 6.31), was founded by Matthew of Ajello, a prominent figure at the court of William II, sponsor of the Benedictine order in Palermo, to which he also entrusted the monastery of Santa Maria dei Latini or “del Cancelliere” (1169) and the Ospedale di Ognissanti (c. 1180). The name of Magione was assumed after the monastery had been conceded (1197) to the order of St Mary of Jerusalem of the Teutonic Knights, who there established the *mansio* for southern Italy, a bridgehead for incursions into the Holy Land. According to a convincing interpretation of the documents relating to its foundation, the church would have been built between 1169 and 1174, whereas the Cistercian monastery and its attached cloister is datable to between 1189 and 1193.<sup>84</sup> An indirect confirmation of such a building sequence could rest upon a comparison between the layout of the Magione and that of Santo Spirito, whose descent from northern European Norman architecture has been widely debated.<sup>85</sup> Although the layout of the two churches may show undoubted analogies, there are significant divergences in elevation.

The two walls pierced by arches that delimit the central part of the deep choir of Santo Spirito serve to emphasise the layout in the form of the Latin cross, visually extending the nave. Conversely, the layout in the form of the Greek cross of the broad choir of SS. Trinità is rendered highly visible on the outside through the complex articulation of the volumes of the church. That would certainly come to constitute an anomaly for the churches following the Order of St. Benedict, which, as a matter of course, favoured the layout in the form of the Latin cross, and might indeed corroborate the hypothesis that the church pre-existed the settlement of the Benedictines.

The employment of columns and decorative elements in marble in the Magione would itself seem to endorse the thesis, already supported by documentary evidence, that it predates the foundation of the monastery.

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church were demolished in order to built a portico, which was, however, never completed. For the work of restoration see Tomaselli, *Il ritorno dei Normanni*, pp. 139–52.

<sup>84</sup> Mandalà, “Una famiglia di marmorari,” pp. 208–210.

<sup>85</sup> The layout of the church has often been equated with the now non-existent one of the cathedral of Palermo. The comparison is therefore based upon a hypothetical reconstruction by H.M. Schwarz, who, together with Anton Springer, argues for the derivation of the layout from Nordic models: Anton Springer, *Die Mittelalterliche Kunst in Palermo* (Bonn, 1886), Heinrich M. Schwarz, “Die Baukunst Kalabries und Siziliens in Zeitalter der Normannen, I: Die Lateinischen Kirchengründungen des 11. Jahrhunderts und der Dom in Cefalù,” *Römisches Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 6 (1942–44), p. 100.

Despite its greater simplicity, it is however plausible that the church of Santo Spirito had also been entrusted to the Cistercian monks once its construction was completed. Indeed, both the choice of design, a combination of a basilical and a centric plan, and the insertion of decorative elements such as the polychrome lava and limestone inlays, the interlaced arches in the apses and the cushion-shaped ashlar around the walls are all elements characteristic of late Norman Palermitan buildings.<sup>86</sup>

The pronounced “pre-Gothic” verticality of the interior of SS. Trinità, particularly evident in the central aisle at whose edges as many as three orders of corner columns are superposed; the decoration of the apse with intertwined arches (church of Santo Spirito, the Cathedrals of Palermo<sup>87</sup> and, above all, of Monreale), as well as the layout itself, betray the lateness of its construction, which reproduces themes by now entirely familiar to Norman Palermo, though inflected in original ways. The cloister, in origin having a rectangular layout with 14 × 7 arcades, with its twinned columns and double capitals resting upon a continuous plinth, reproduces in these respects a schema already employed at Cefalù. However, both the singular moulding in torus form which decorates the intrados of the arches between the columns, interrupting itself in line with their spring, and the choice of repertoire in the representations on the capitals certainly recalls the cloister of the cathedral at Monreale, erected by William II, by which Matthew of Ajello was indubitably inspired.

In reexamining a parchment from the Tabularium at the Magione, to be precise, a deed of donation of one Constantine to SS. Trinità of Palermo from 1202, Giuseppe Mandalà<sup>88</sup> has focussed attention upon the witness's signature of Thomas, an Arabo-Christian following the Byzantine rite, and the nephew of this same Constantine, of whom it is specified that he was

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<sup>86</sup> Where the interlaced arches and the tiles that decorate the apses are concerned, a dating as late as the Swabian period has in fact been proposed. See Torregrossa, “La chiesa di Santo Spirito,” pp. 103–110. I would also refer the reader to this study for the convincing comparison with the church of Santa Maria del Patir in Rossano Calabro (Calabria), which presents various analogues with Santo Spirito, first and foremost, the employment of masonry cylindrical pilasters supporting the arches of the aisles. This comparison brings out, once again, the indubitable impact of the monastic orders, whether Latin or Greek (the so-called “Basiliani”), upon the channelling of the artistic models.

<sup>87</sup> For brevity's sake I have decided not to include an account of the cathedral of Palermo, rebuilt by archbishop Walter between 1170 and c. 1190, on the site in which there was a mosque, and reconsecrated after the Conquest of Palermo. The paucity of information dating back to the time of its construction and the long series of radical changes made to the building up until the beginning of the 19th century make it a difficult matter to reconstitute the Norman *facies*.

<sup>88</sup> Mandalà, “Una famiglia di marmorari.”

*frater olim magistri Symonis marmorarii de civitate Panormi*. In the document, signed in Arabic and in Greek, Simon is addressed by the title of *magister/mu'allim*, that is, a genuine *artifex*, probably also at the head of a workshop. At any rate, the deed of donation attests that this workshop was certainly active in Palermo between 1169 and 1202. Furthermore, the analysis of another document from 1169 has enabled this same scholar quite plausibly to identify in Andrew, likewise a marble worker, the father of Constantine and Simon.<sup>89</sup> We are therefore dealing with a Palermitan workshop of Arabo-Christian marble workers in existence at least from the mid-12th century, that is, in the period of the great Palermitan construction sites and of the participation of workmen of diverse provenance. Whatever the precise origin of these *magistri*, and whether they were "local men or Melchites having come from the Arabo-Islamic East,"<sup>90</sup> their particular formation, which certainly occurred in Sicily, could also have enabled them to devise the very particular patterns to be found in the marble floor panels.

The documentary sources seem therefore to confirm what had already emerged from an interpretation of the formal and geometrical qualities of the Palermitan floors, through which well-founded doubts have crystallized regarding the frequently posited link between these creations and the exclusive contribution of "Cosmatesque" masters coming from Rome and/or from the South of Italy.<sup>91</sup> Even taking into consideration a well-known capital from the cloister of Monreale, signed by *Romanus*, son of the abovementioned Constantine, and phrased in a stilted Latin, such a relationship would seem to be quite implausible. Aside from the patronymic, it is precisely the hesitant use of the language that lends weight to the hypothesis that he belonged to the same family of Mozarabs, who wrote in Greek and in Arabic, but were little versed in Latin. Bearing in mind the fact that Constantine was an oblate of the Teutonic Knights, the beneficiaries, moreover, of his donation of 1202, there is a strong likelihood that he would have involved his entire workshop of marble workers in the construction of the cloister at SS. Trinità.

Certainly, while the rereading of the documents does not justify our extending *sic et simpliciter* the contribution of this family of Sicilian marble workers to the floors as well as to the capitals, one potential implication

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 200–203, the quotation is at p. 201.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 227.

<sup>91</sup> Di Liberto, "Il pavimento... di S. Cataldo"; *Ead.*, "Il pavimento... di S. Maria dell'Ammiraglio."



is hard to avoid: as I have already observed, the figure of the acrobat included in two inlays in the floor at the Martorana has its prototype in a capital at the cloister of the Cathedral of Cefalù and would then have its epigone in a capital at the cloister of the Cathedral of Monreale (see Fig. 6.32). The role of this family may well prove to have been far more wide-ranging than has so far been imagined.

By means of this excursus I have endeavoured to emphasise how each of the various cultural elements that body forth the Norman architectonic and figurative language have their own *raison d'être*. It would nonetheless be an error to try and account for its formation solely in terms of an ideology of power, and without taking into consideration the gradual creation and subsequent reinforcement of a local tradition. The aulic examples to which we have referred, as much in a religious context as in that of palace architecture, richly suggest what such contributions may have been. The prevalence of each one of them is only in part determined by the chronology of the buildings and seems rather to depend upon their particular function. If I have included later examples of the application of already well-known formulae and motifs, it was because they confirm how it is that the distinction between Byzantine, Islamic and northern European influences tends more and more to lose all meaning, until in the end, given the existence of a Norman language that could only have been formed in the land of Sicily, it becomes almost entirely specious.

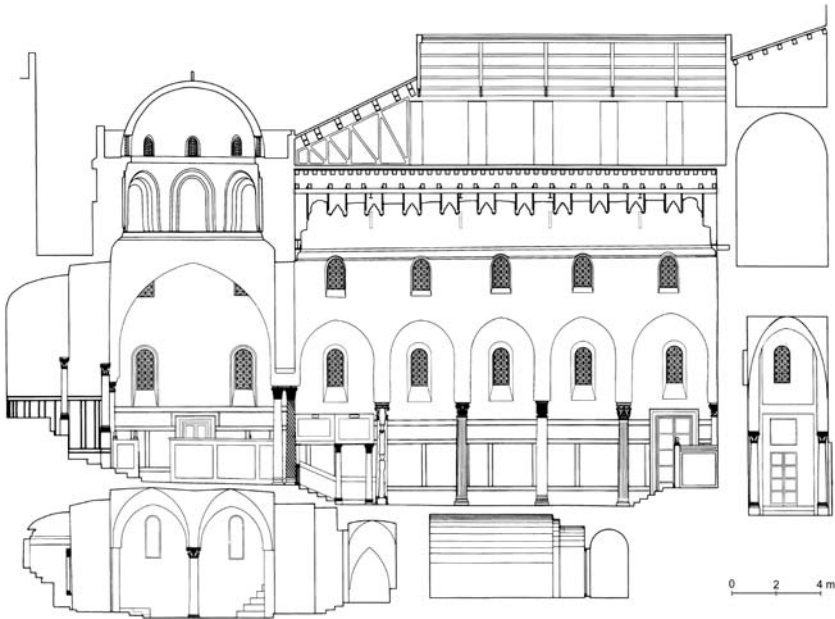
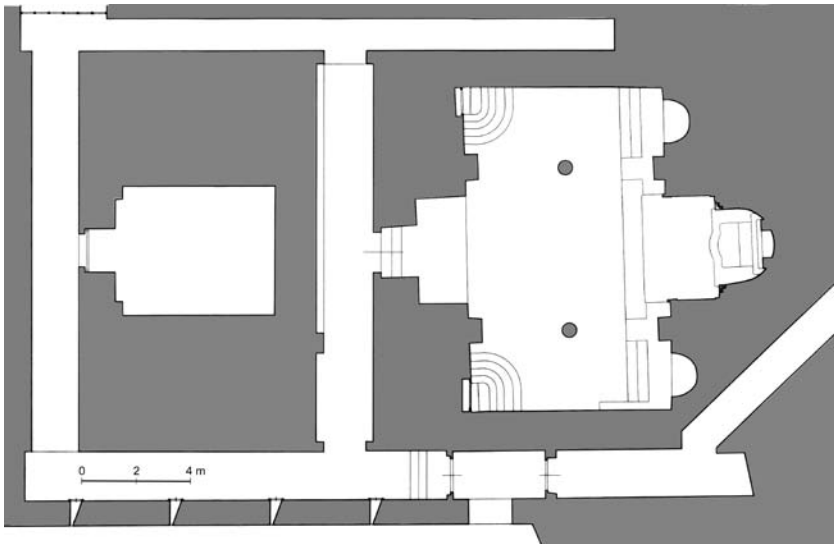


Fig. 6.1-2. Cappella Palatina. Plan of the lower Church and longitudinal section (Plan by Soprintendenza ai Beni Culturali di Palermo; graphic by R. Di Liberto)

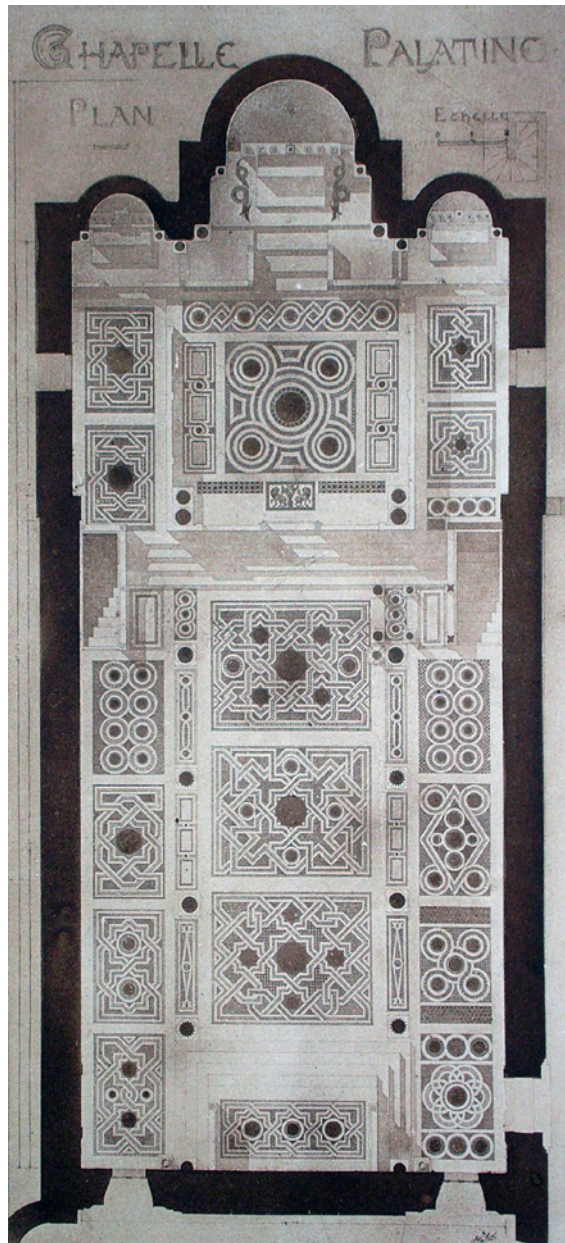


Fig. 6.3. The floor of the Cappella Palatina (from H. D'Espouy, *Fragments d'architecture du Moyen Âge et de la Renaissance d'après les relevés et restauration des anciens pensionnaires de l'Académie de France à Rome*, II, table 14, Paris, 1925)

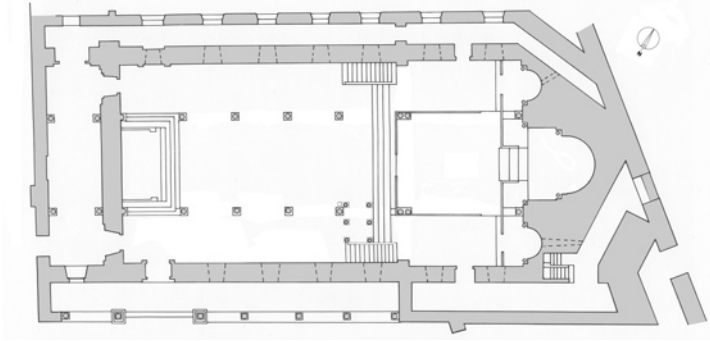


Fig. 6.4. Plan of the Cappella Palatina  
(from W. Tronzo, *The culture...*; graphic by R. Di Liberto)



Fig. 6.5. The wooden ceiling of the Cappella Palatina with *muqarnas*  
(photograph by R. Di Liberto)

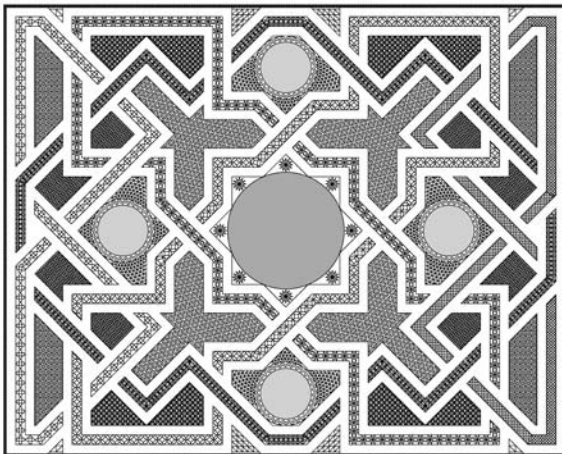


Fig. 6.6. Cappella Palatina. A pannel of the central nave's pavement (R. Di Liberto)

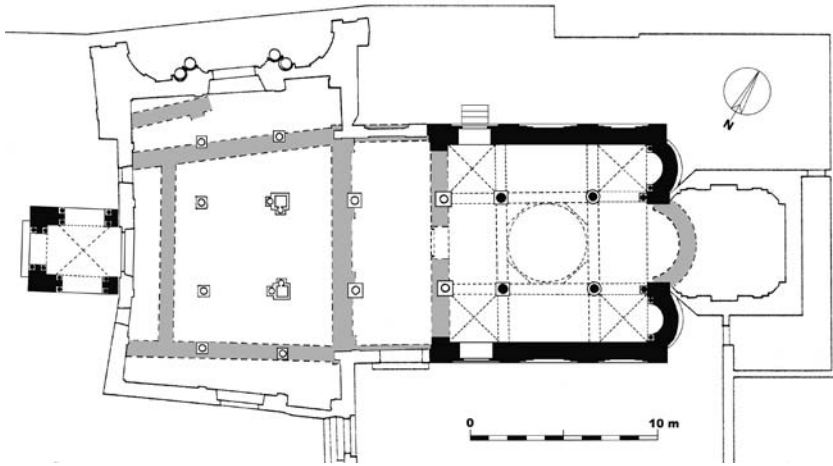


Fig. 6.7. Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio (the Martorana). Reconstruction of the various building phases. In grey the demolished medieval structures (from S. Curčić, "L'architettura della chiesa"; graphic by R. Di Liberto)



Fig. 6.8. Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio (the Martorana). The dome at the centre of the church (photograph by Sergio Aiosa)

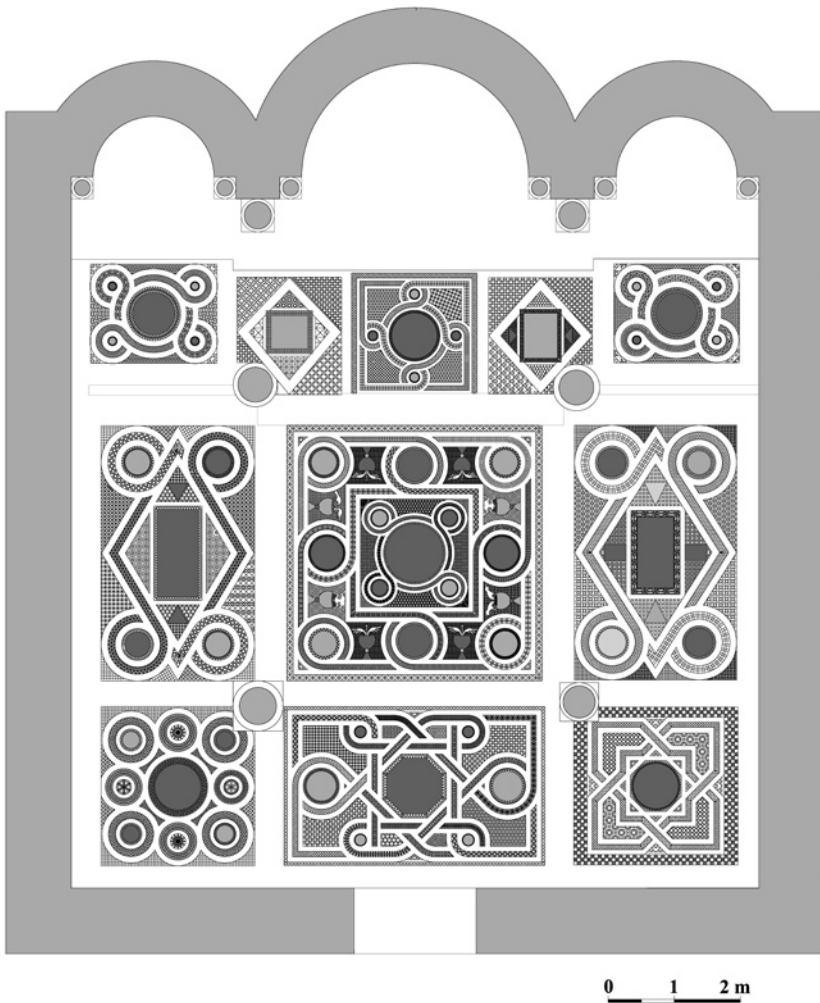


Fig. 6.9. Plan of the Martorana (R. Di Liberto)

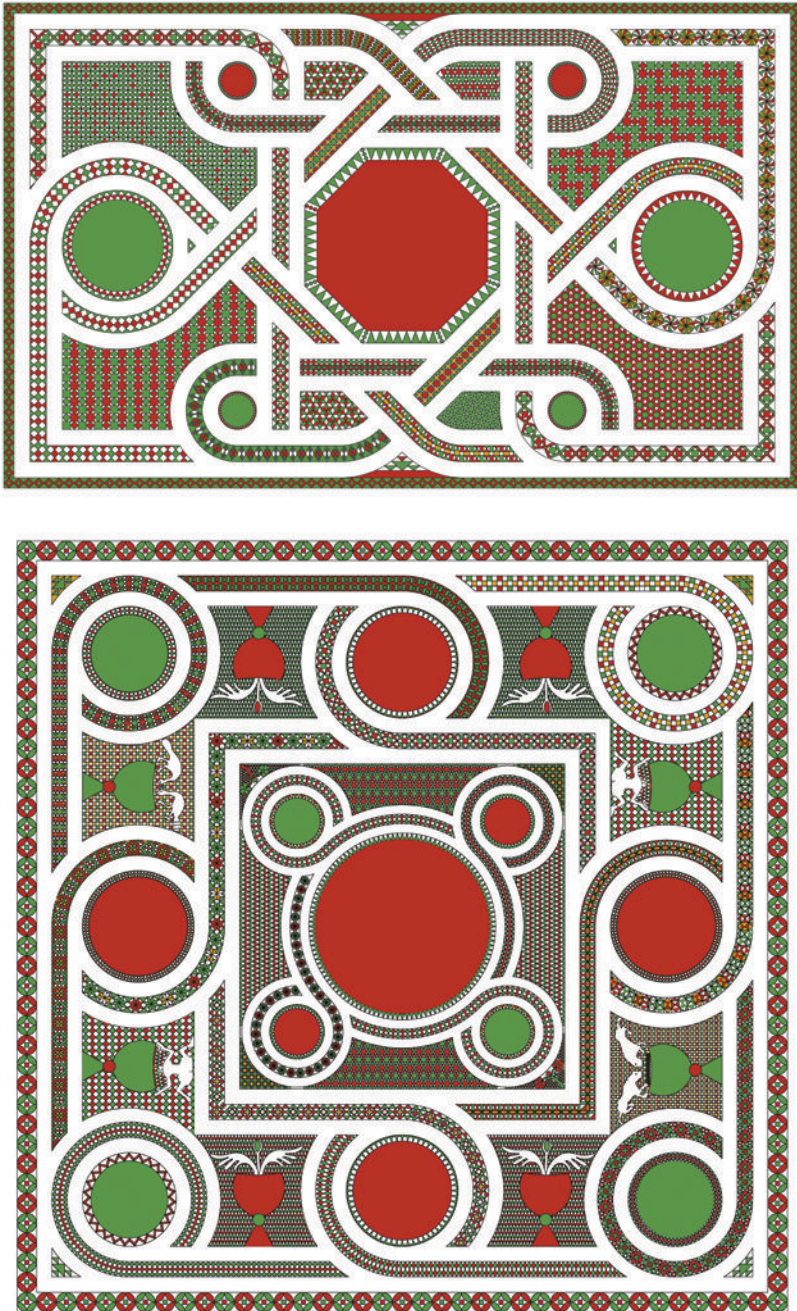


Fig. 6.10–11. Floor of Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio (the Martorana). The entrance panel and the central panel beneath the dome (R. Di Liberto)

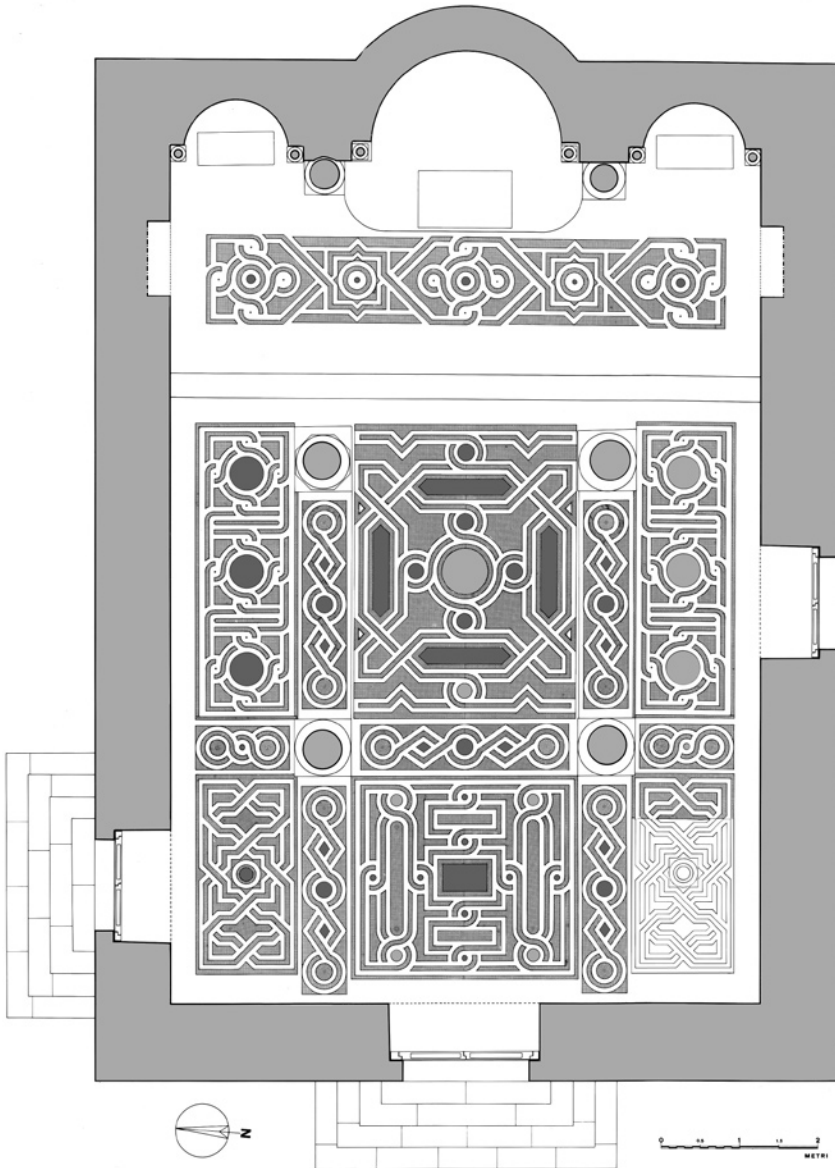


Fig. 6.12. Plan of the church of San Cataldo (R. Di Liberto)



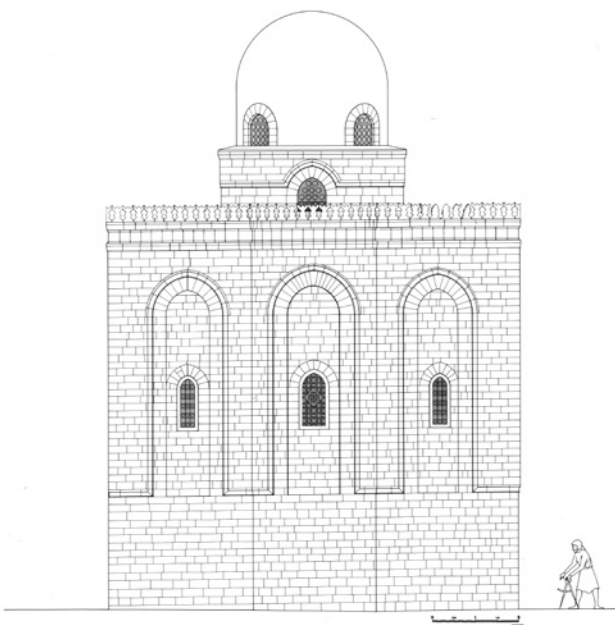


Fig. 6.13. Church of San Cataldo. View of the apses (R. Di Liberto)

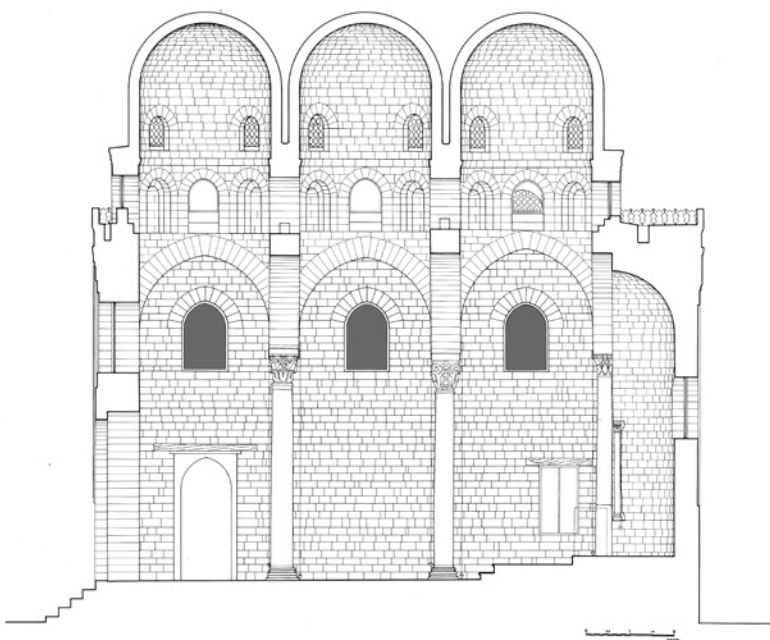


Fig. 6.14. Church of San Cataldo. Longitudinal section (R. Di Liberto)

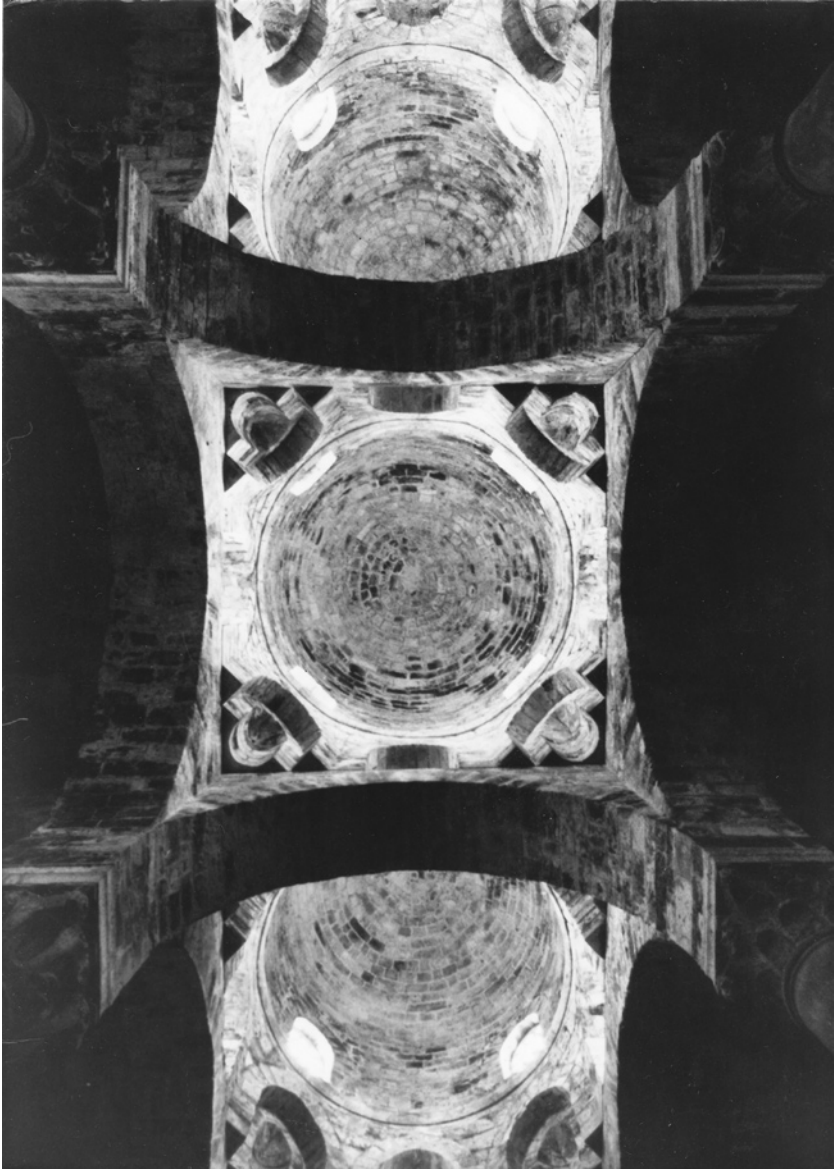


Fig. 6.15. The three domes along an axis of the church of San Cataldo  
(photograph by Francesco Filangeri)

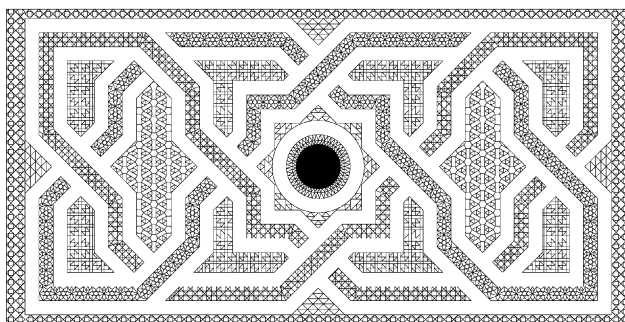


Fig. 6.16–17. Church of San Cataldo. Plan and photograph of the panel in front of the northern entrance (R. Di Liberto)

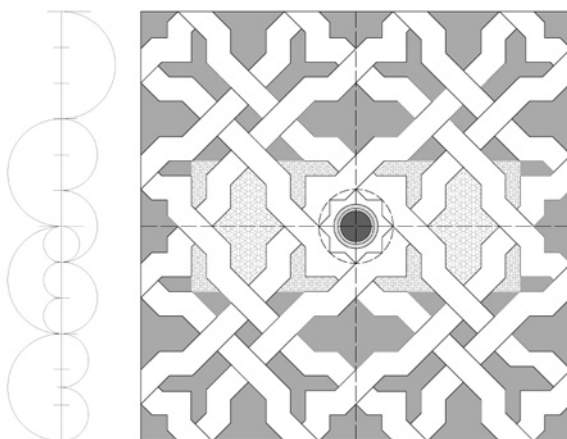


Fig. 6.18. Church of San Cataldo. Geometrical schema of the panel in front of the northern entrance (R. Di Liberto)

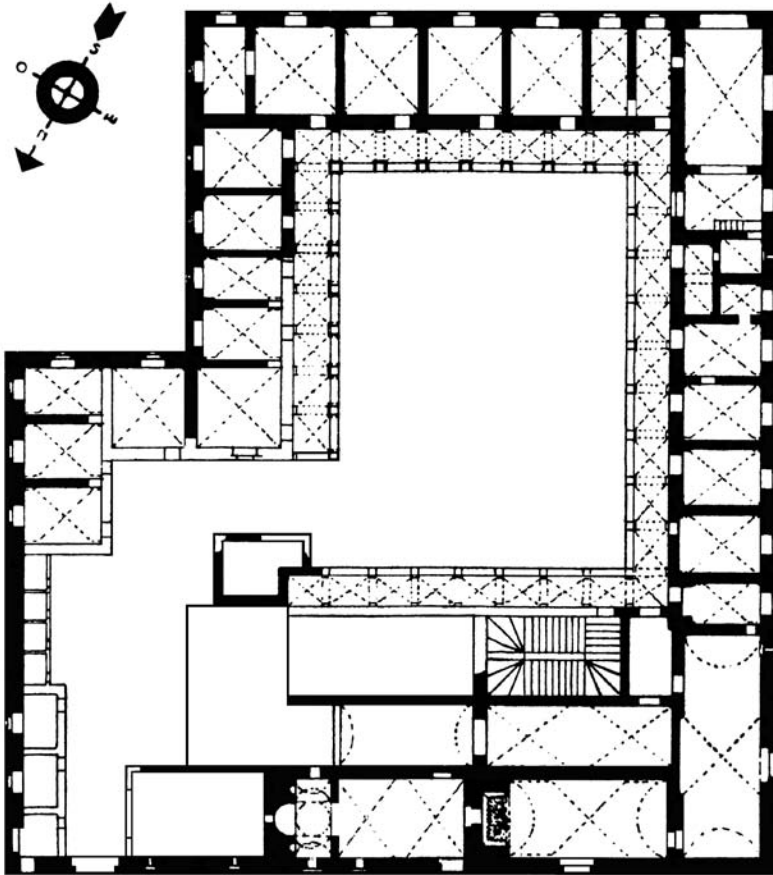


Fig. 6.19. Maredolce or Favara. Plan of the palace (from Adolph Goldschmidt, "Die normannischen Königspaläste in Palermo", in *Zeitschrift für Bauwesen*, 48, 1898)

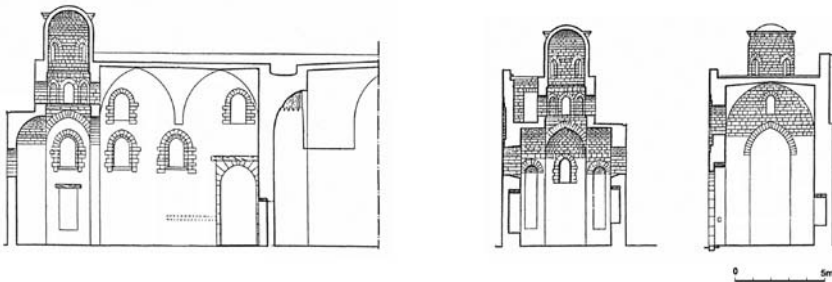


Fig. 6.20. Section of the church of San Filippo and Giacomo (plan by Mario Guiotto in G. Ciotta, *La cultura architettonica*)

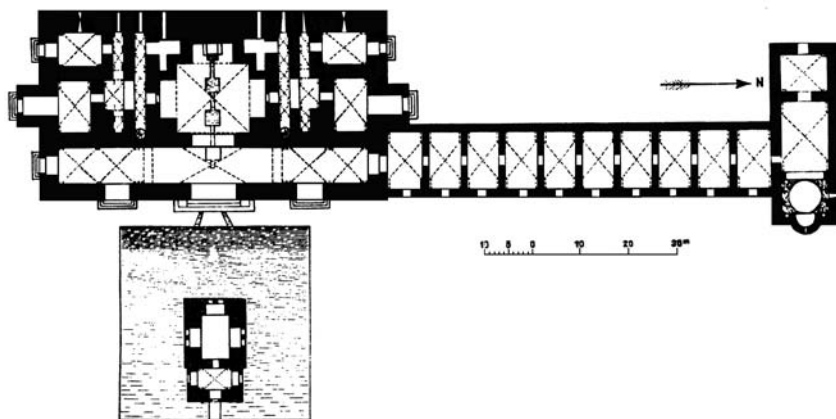


Fig. 6.21. Zisa, reconstruction of the planimetry (from A. Goldschmidt, "Die normannischen Königspaläste")



Fig. 6.21a. The epigraph in Arabic characters from the Zisa turned into the palace battlements (photograph by Francesco Filangeri)

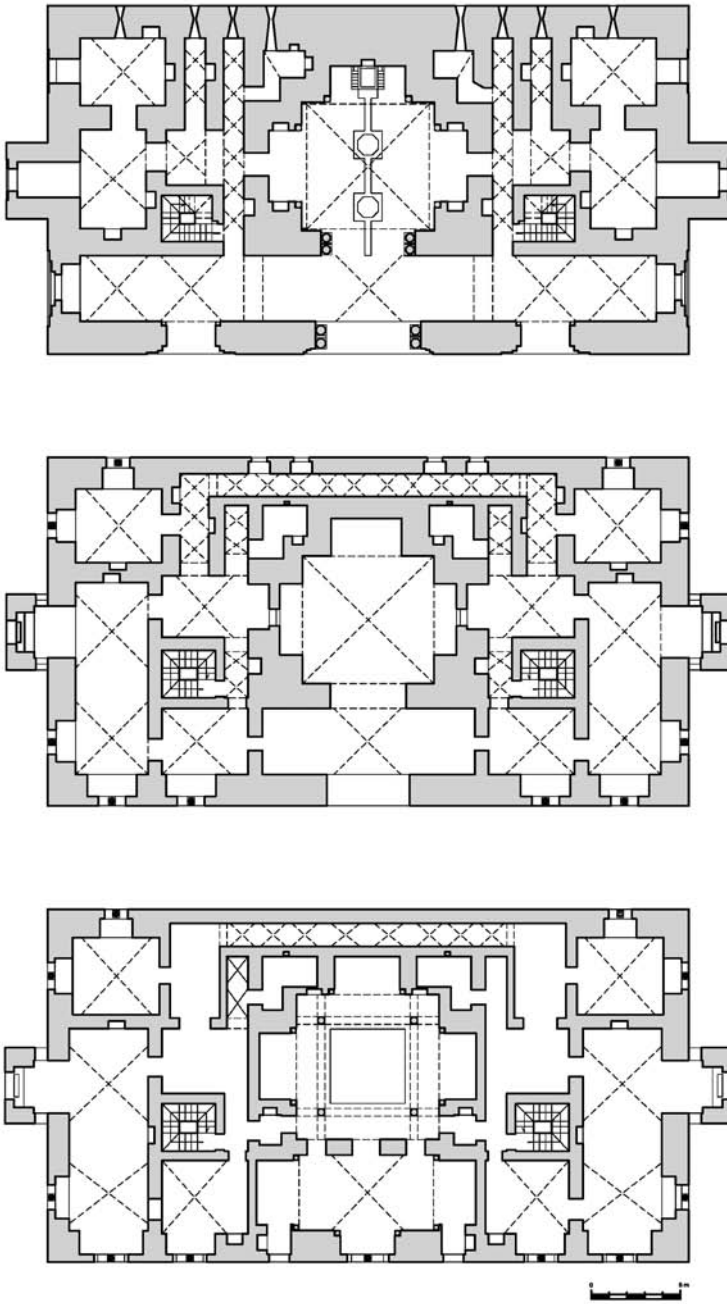


Fig. 6.22. Zisa, speculative reconstruction of the plan on three floors  
 (from G. Bellafiore, *La Zisa...*; graphic by R. Di Liberto)

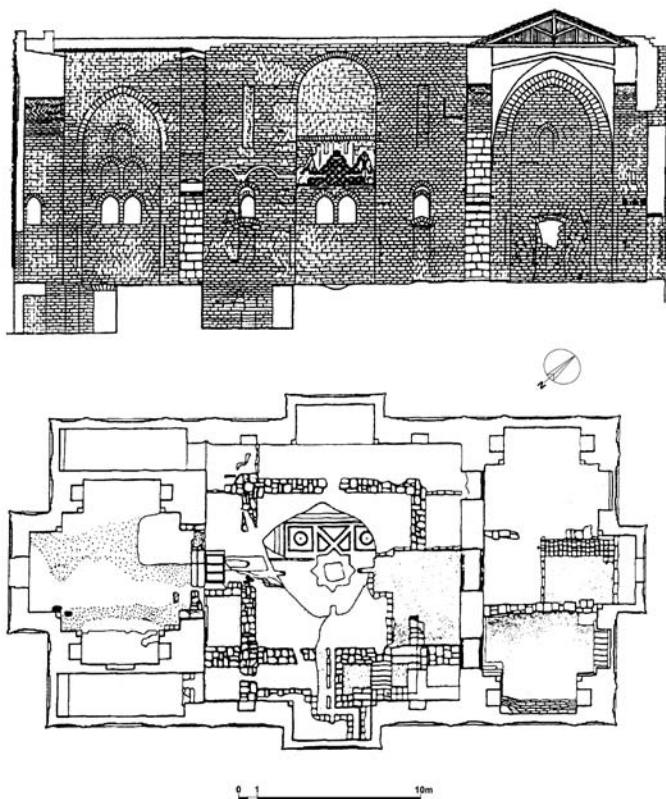


Fig. 6.23. Cuba. Longitudinal section and plan (plan of S. Bellafiore in G. Ciotta, *La cultura architettonica...*; graphic by R. Di Liberto)

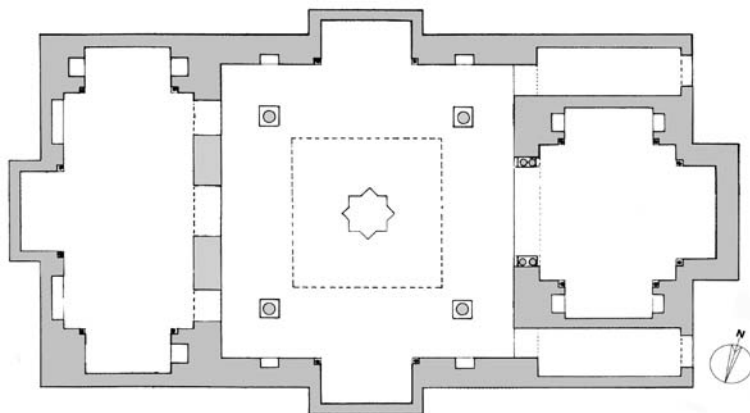


Fig. 6.23a. Cuba. Speculative reconstruction of the plan (from U. Staacke, *Un palazzo normanno a Palermo...*; graphic by R. Di Liberto)

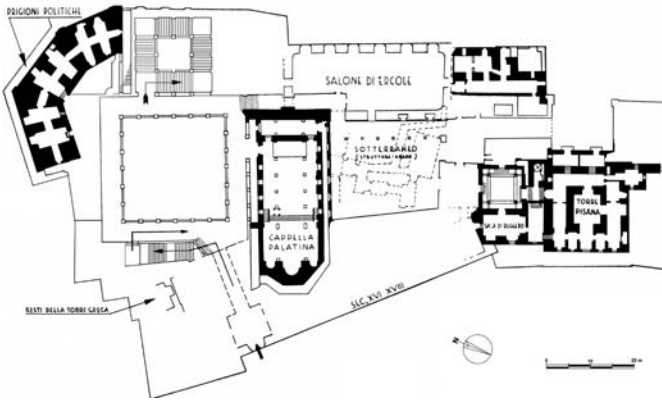


Fig. 6.24. Plan of the Palazzo dei Normanni showing the medieval parts which survive (from Francesco Valenti, "Il palazzo reale di Palermo", in *Bollettino d'Arte*, IV, 1-2; graphic by R. Di Liberto)

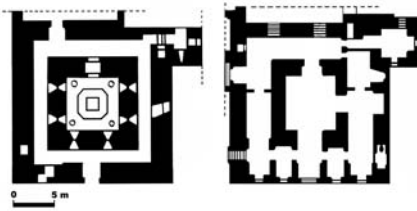


Fig. 6.25. Torre Pisana. Plan of the ground floor and of the first floor (from Francesco Valenti, "Il palazzo reale di Palermo", in *Bollettino d'Arte*, IV, 1-2; graphic by R. Di Liberto)

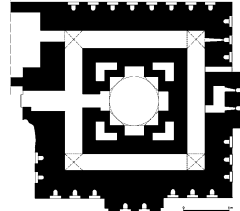


Fig. 6.26. Plan of the al-Manar donjon (from L. Golvin, *Le Magrib central...*; graphic by R. Di Liberto)

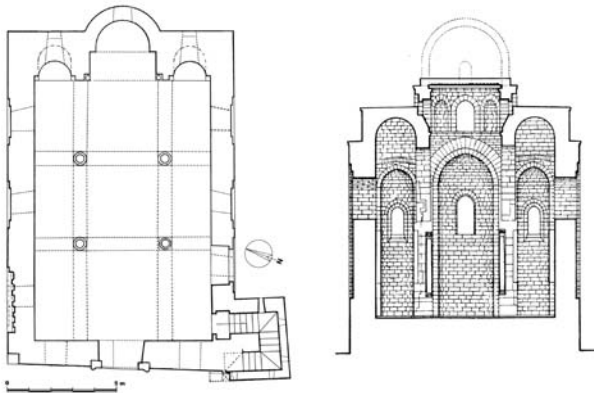


Fig. 6.27. Santa Maria Maddalena. Plan and cross-section (from Di Stefano-Krönig, *Monumenti della Sicilia normanna...*; graphic by R. Di Liberto)



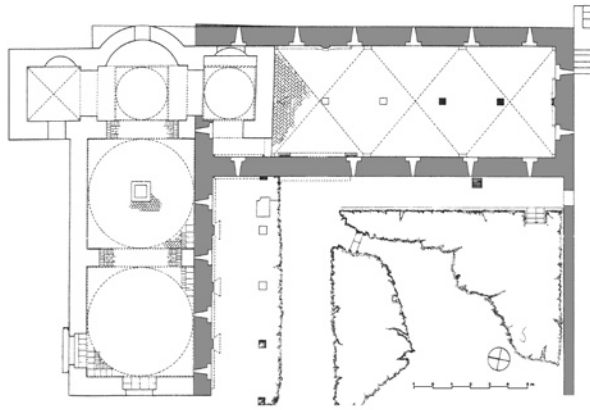


Fig. 6.28. San Giovanni degli Eremiti, plan, longitudinal section and axonometric reconstruction of the building phases (from A. Daidone, "La cosiddetta sala araba")

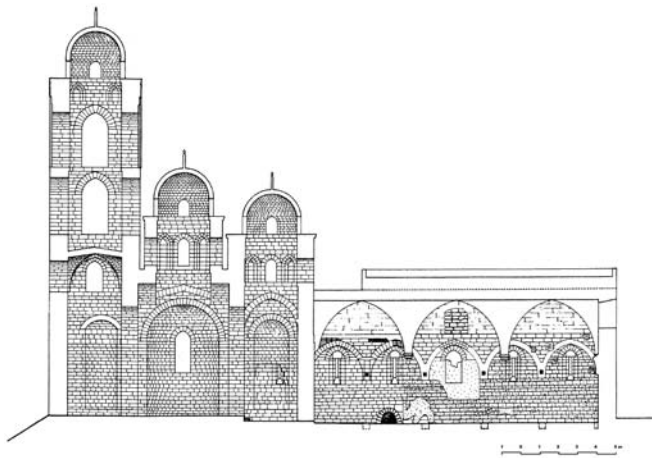


Fig. 6.28a. San Giovanni degli Eremiti, longitudinal section

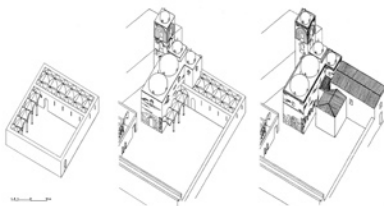


Fig. 6.28b. San Giovanni degli Eremiti, axonometric reconstruction of the building phases

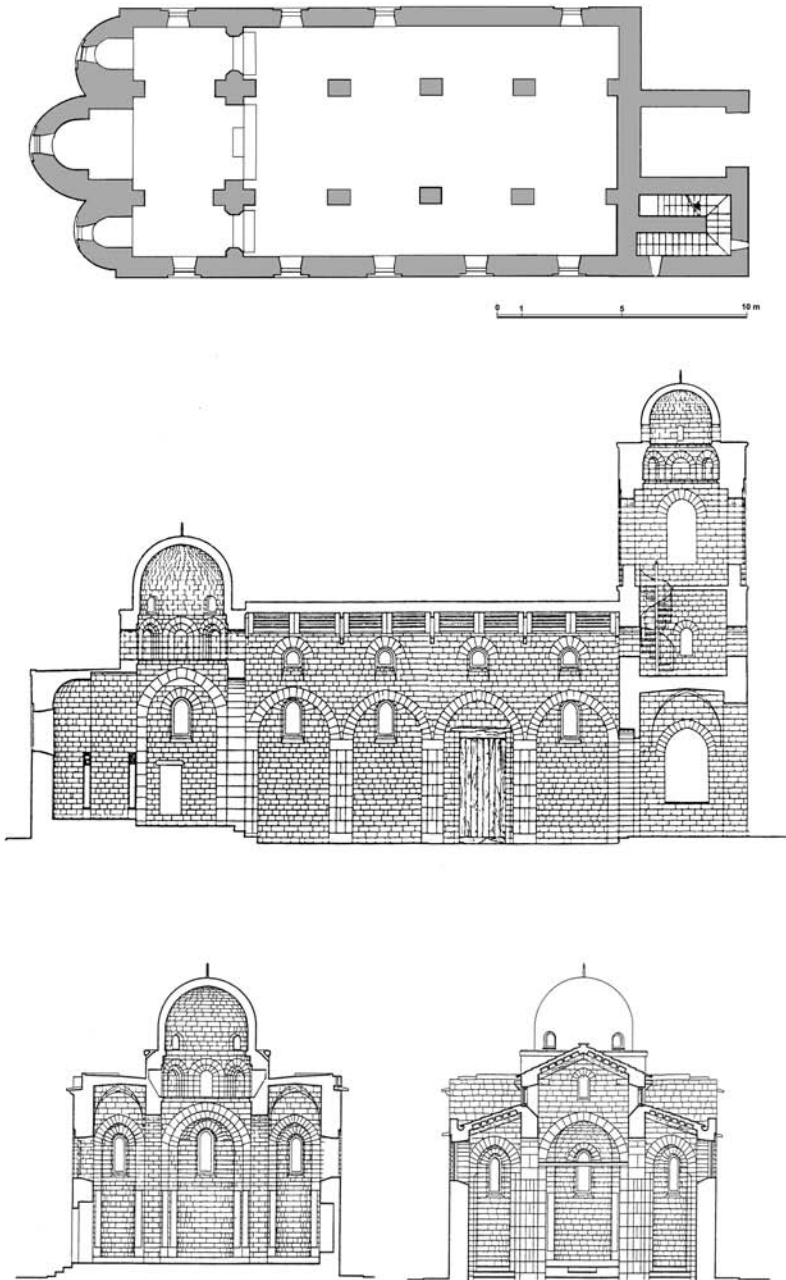


Fig. 6.29. San Giovanni dei Lebbrosi, plan and sections (plan by G. Magro in G. Ciotta, *La cultura architettonica...*; graphic by R. Di Liberto)

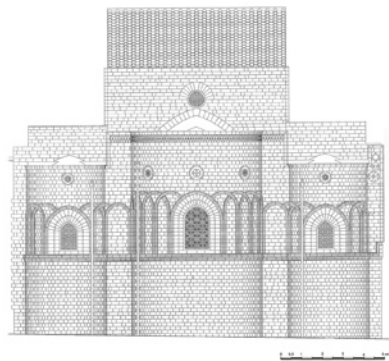
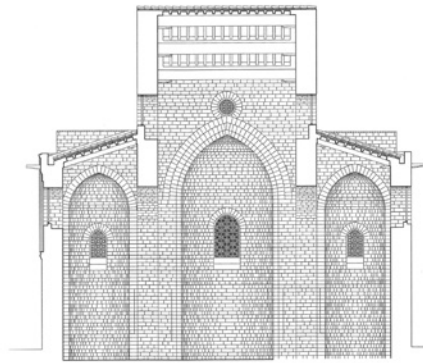
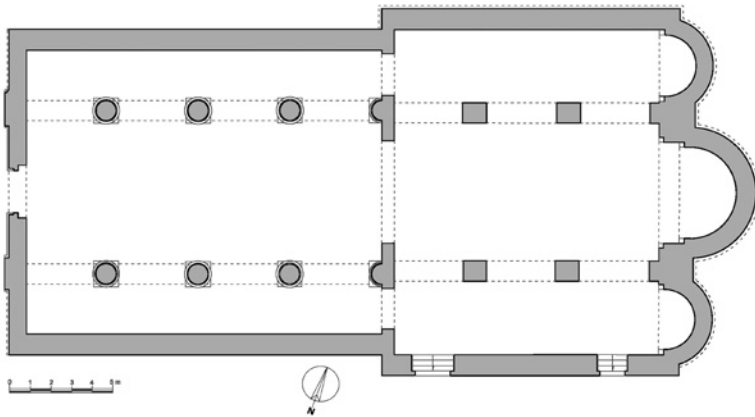


Fig. 6.30. Santo Spirito or "dei Vespri". Plan (plan by T. Torregrossa, graphic by R. Di Liberto). View of the apses and cross-section (from T. Torregrossa, *La chiesa di Santo Spirito a Palermo*)

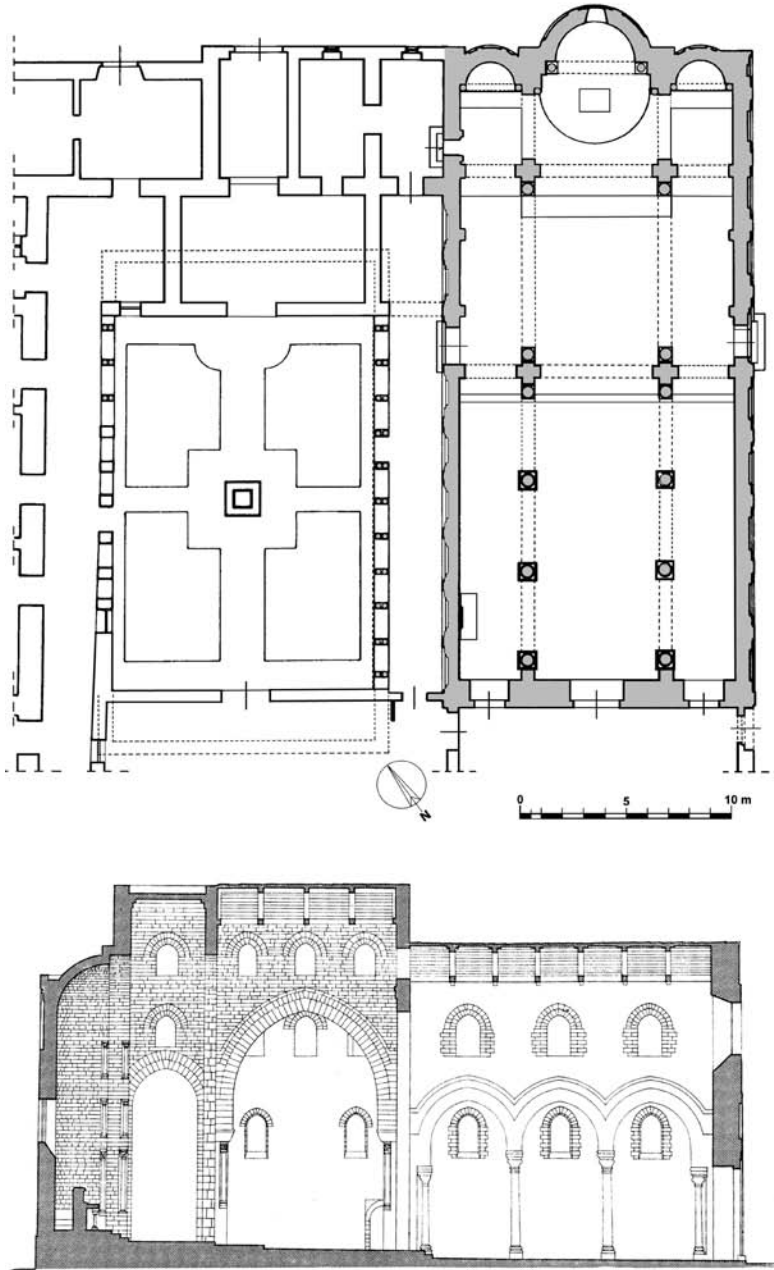


Fig. 6.31. SS. Trinità or Magione. Plan of the monastic complex (from F. Tomaselli, "Palermo. La SS. Trinità della Magione"; graphic by R. Di Liberto) and longitudinal section (from Di Stefano-Krönig, *Monumenti della Sicilia normanna*)



Fig. 6.32. Capital with acrobats from the cloister at Cefalù (photograph by Massimo Lo Verde)



Fig. 6.32a. Marble inlay with the acrobat on the floor of the Martorana (photograph by Sergio Aiosa)



Fig. 6.32b. Capital with acrobat in the cloister at Monreale (photograph by R. Di Liberto)

PALERMO IN THE 12TH CENTURY:  
TRANSFORMATIONS IN *FORMA URBIS*

Elena Pezzini

In early January 1071, after a siege lasting five months, Robert Guiscard and Roger of Hauteville conquered Palermo, the Madīnat Ṣiqilliyya, a great Islamic city fully integrated into the zone of Fatimid prosperity.<sup>1</sup> The city had been the capital of Sicily, a province of the *dār al-Islām*, governed from 947/8 until the early 1040s—in the name of the Fatimid caliphate—by an independent emiral dynasty, the Kalbids.

The years succeeding the fall of the Kalbid dynasty—which had involved the fragmentation of the emirate of Sicily into small territorial units—were marked by grave political instability. In a letter from the Cairo Geniza, a member of a family of Sicilian Jewish merchants, having emigrated to Tyre, paints a bleak picture of the state of the city in the mid-11th century. His correspondent learned of “the misfortunes that befell Palermo,” which were described as follows: “We witnessed events which I should have gladly done without, namely bloodshed. We trod on corpses as if it were common ground. (There raged) a heavy epidemic. The price for a *thumn* (of bread) rose to over a dinar and there was none to be had.” The merchant then went on to speak of his own misfortunes: “our warehouse containing over 1000 quarter dinars (worth of goods) was broken into. Sa’īd’s warehouse was also forced. Subsequently, two months before the death of my father . . . he bought orchards and a house from a Christian for 100 dinars. But when the turmoil increased, they became

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The following abbreviations will be employed in the text.

Amato di Montecassino: *Storia de’ normanni di Amato da Montecassino volgarizzata in antico francese*, ed. Vincenzo de Bartholomaeis, FSI, Scrittori sec. XI (Rome, 1935);

Falcando: Ugo Falcando, *La Historia o Liber de regno Siciliae e la Epistola ad Petrum Panormitanæ Ecclesiae thesaurarium*, ed. Giovan Battista Siragusa (Rome, 1897);

Malaterra: Gaufredi Malaterræ, *De rebus gestis Rogerii Calabriae et Siciliae comitis et Roberti Guiscardi ducis fratris eius*, ed. Ernesto Pontieri, RIS 2, V 1 (Bologna, 1928);

Di Giovanni: Vincenzo Di Giovanni, *La topografia antica di Palermo dal secolo X al XV*, I–II (Palermo, 1889–90)

<sup>1</sup> As regards the Islamic city, see the chapters on Islamic Palermo by Annliese Nef and Alessandra Bagnera in the present volume, together with the respective bibliographies.

worthless.”<sup>2</sup> Yet, despite the disorder and the difficult political phase through which Palermo was passing, it was still a great city, with a Muslim population composed of several communities of quite distinct origins, and with communities of Jews and Christians. At the time of the siege the city was governed by a council composed of members of the elites, with which the Normans negotiated the surrender.<sup>3</sup>

So far as urban morphology is concerned, Palermo in the late Islamic period was a complex city, with several hierarchised nucleuses.<sup>4</sup> The generative nucleus, Madīnat Balarm, subsequently Qaṣr al-qadīm (“Old Castle”), and hence the late medieval name Cassaro, corresponded to the Punic-Roman ancient city and occupied a narrow calcareous platform, delimited to the south and the north by two watercourses—known respectively as the Winter River and the Rūṭa, being named in the later sources as Sabucia/Kemonia and as Papireto—which formed, in the estuary, a large and well-protected basin (see Fig. 7.1).<sup>5</sup> This nucleus had inherited from the ancient city the regular plan with rectangular framework still legible today, defined by a central axis running N-E/S-W (roughly corresponding to the western half of the present-day Corso Vittorio Emanuele and attested in the medieval sources with various different names: *simāt* in Arabic, *vicus marmoreus*, *platea*, *via* or *ruga marmorea* in Latin) and by a secondary road system at right angles to the axis.<sup>6</sup> It is, however, unclear whether the two streets that, in the present-day layout, run inside

<sup>2</sup> Shlomo Simonsohn, *The Jews in Sicily*, I (Leiden-New York-Cologne, 1997), pp. 278–81. The departure of a part of the population, and in particular of the elites, is documented, albeit weakly: Annliese Nef, “Les élites savantes urbaines dans la Sicile islamique,” in *La Sicile à l'époque islamique. Questions de méthode et renouvellement récent des problématiques*, MEFRM 116–1 (2004), p. 460, note 39 and p. 464.

<sup>3</sup> Henri Bresc maintains that in this phase the city had developed a form of independence and “une pratique du pouvoir partagé, sinon démocratique,” Henri Bresc, “Commune et citoyenneté dans la Sicile des derniers siècles du Moyen Âge” in Henri Bresc, *Una stagione in Sicilia*, ed. Marcello Pacifico (Palermo, 2010), p. 208.

<sup>4</sup> The definition of Palermo as a city with several nucleuses derives from Henri Bresc, “Filologia urbana: Palermo dai Normanni agli aragonesi,” *Incontri Meridionali* III serie, 1–2 (1981), 12.

<sup>5</sup> On the geomorphological structure of Palermo see Pietro Todaro, “Il territorio,” in Rosario la Duca, ed., *Storia di Palermo I. Dalle origini al periodo punico-romano* (Palermo, 1999), pp. 25–35.

<sup>6</sup> This is essentially the street plan that has survived to the present day, according to the hypothesis of Rosario La Duca, *Palermo felicissima* (Palermo, 1973) p. 24, revived and elaborated upon by Oscar Belvedere, “Appunti sulla topografia antica di Panormo,” *Kokalos* XXXIII (1987), 289–304, and confirmed by the recent archaeological excavations which have led F. Spatafora to date the layout of the city to the mid-4th century: Francesca Spatafora, “Dagli emporia fenici alle città puniche. Elementi di continuità e discontinuità nell'organizzazione urbanistica di Palermo e Solunto,” in Sophie Helas and Dirce Marzoli, eds., *Phönizisches und puniche Städtewesen (Aktien der internationalen Tagung in Rom*

the ancient city walls, following their outline, and which are overlooked by buildings built against the walls, date back to the original foundation of the city or are the product of a later phase. Too distant from the fortifications to be the defensive roads (*vie di arroccamento*), they became a fundamental element in the medieval street-plan, linking up the city gates. Even in the late medieval period they were called *shera*, *xera*, from the Arabic *shāri'*, that is, a primary street for public use.<sup>7</sup> To this first nucleus was counterposed another *madīna*, a fortified palatine city, al-Khāliṣa, founded in 937/8 in close proximity to the port, and the administrative and political centre of the Kalbid emirs. Between the two *madīna*-s and beyond the rivers that flowed to the foot of Balarm, there extended vast quarters, the Ḥārat al-Ṣaḡāliba, Ḥārat Maṣjid Ibn Ṣaqlāb (quarter of the mosque of Ibn Ṣaqlāb), the Ḥārat al-jadīda, al-Ja'fariyya and other distinctive territorial units, Ḥārat Abī Ḥimāz or Abī Ḥimār, Ḥārat al-Tājī.<sup>8</sup>

The *forma urbis* arose at once through urban planning and spontaneous growth, and several elements in dynamic interrelation had contributed in differing ways and varying degrees to its construction: namely, the emirs, through their planned creation of quarters, the market (in part stimulated by, and dependent upon the central power), and urban society itself. It is probable that in the years between around 1050 (the presumed date of the drafting of the anonymous *Kitāb Gharā'ib al-funūn wa-mulaḥ al-'uyūn* which refers to the fortification of the Ḥārat al-Ṣaḡāliba)<sup>9</sup> and the Norman conquest in 1072, the entire perimeter of the city was shut in by an extensive city wall which enclosed the ancient fortified urban nucleus, Balarm, and the palatine citadel, al-Khāliṣa.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, after the fall of the

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vom 21. bis 23. Februar 2007), *Hiberia Archaeologica* 13 (2009), 219–37, with a bibliography preceding it.

<sup>7</sup> For the meaning of *shāri'*, Paolo Cuneo, *Storia dell'urbanistica. Il mondo islamico* (Bari, 1986), pp. 92–93; Id. and Ugo Marazzi "Glossario dei termini urbanistici del mondo islamico," *Storia della Città* 46 (1987), p. 77, and, with particular reference to Palermo, Girolamo Caracausi, *Arabismi medievali di Sicilia* (Palermo, 1983), pp. 341–43 with the relevant references to the documents and Bresc "Filologia urbana," p. 13 who maintains that in Palermo the term had come to mean defensive road (*via di arroccamento*).

<sup>8</sup> Bagnera, in the present volume.

<sup>9</sup> *Kitāb Gharā'ib*, pp. 412–13.

<sup>10</sup> As it seems plausible to deduce from the combined readership of the *Kitāb Gharā'ib* and of the sources on the Norman siege (Amato di Montecassino, XVIII, pp. 279–81, Malaterra, XLV, pp. 52–53). There is no historiographical consensus as regards the dating of Palermo's external perimeter wall, which has been attributed both to the late Islamic period and to the early Norman period. See Roberta Sciortino, "Archeologia del sistema fortificato medievale di Palermo. Nuovi dati per la conoscenza della seconda cinta muraria (tardo X–XII secolo)," *Archeologia Medievale* XXXIII (2007), 283–95, where she notes the need to verify archaeologically the hypothesis of a dating to the Islamic period. One might



Kalbid dynasty, the administrative and political centre had again been transferred from the Khālīṣa to Balarm.

I propose now to advance a little more than a hundred years. Suppose we consider the city as it was at the end of the Norman period, and ask ourselves if, and how the landscape had changed. How had the Madinat Ṣiqilliyya turned into the *felix urbs Panormi*, the capital of the new Norman Kingdom which extended across Sicily and southern Italy? How had its population changed? What are the different stages into which this transformation might be divided? What political forces or social dynamics had given rise to it?

It is no easy matter to sketch a history of the transformation to which the urban form of Palermo was subject, indeed, such an ambition can only be realised in broad outline and by addressing macro-problems. One has to reckon not only with heterogeneous sources, which are irregularly distributed and which often offer no more than sudden flashes of illumination on particular aspects of a problem, all of which weighs heavily upon the attempt to effect a reconstruction, but also with an immense bibliography on some aspects, namely, those associated with the central power and with the court.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, the questions posed above are not new. After the long phase of studies of historical topography at the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries, and after the significant contributions made to urban history in the 1950s,<sup>12</sup> the problem of the “construction of urban space” and of the transformation of the city between the Islamic period and the late Middle Ages, has been raised and clearly addressed from the 1980s following a trajectory whose first stage alone will be considered here. Moreover, studies on the Norman city have evidently proliferated in the course of the last few years.

Besides, the new profile of Islamic Palermo<sup>13</sup> delineated by recent studies cannot help but have repercussions for the image that we are

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also revise the archaeological data by means of a systematic study of the ceramic contexts reconstituted through the investigations conducted so far.

<sup>11</sup> For such a bibliography see Annliese Nef, *Conquérir et gouverner la Sicilie islamique aux XI et XII siècles*, Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome, 346 (Rome, 2011).

<sup>12</sup> Illuminato Peri, “Il porto di Palermo dagli arabi agli aragonesi,” *Economia e storia* V (1958), n. 4, 422–69.

<sup>13</sup> The writings of Henri Bresc are of fundamental importance in this regard: “Filologia urbana;” “In ruga que arabice dicitur zucac: les rues de Palerme (1070–1460),” in *Le paysage urbain au Moyen Age (Actes du XII Congrès de la Société des historiens médiévistes de l'Enseignement supérieur Public)* (Lyons, 1981), pp. 155–86; “L'espace public à Palerme 1100–1460,”

endeavouring to construct of the Norman city,<sup>14</sup> while at the same time investigations into later phases in the city's development,<sup>15</sup> based upon documentary series richer than those available for the 12th and 13th centuries, enable us to attribute to the late medieval and modern period both significant interventions in the road layout and the urbanisation of vast intramural areas previously occupied by gardens. Starting out from the present-day structure, such investigations allow us to identify, by subtraction and employing a regressive method, the elements that may safely be ascribed to the medieval city.

Finally, archaeological research, which may be able to supply important answers to questions which constantly recur in the historiography from the 16th century onwards, has recently made fundamental contributions to our knowledge of the urban topography and of the history of the city, above all for the period between the end of the Norman period and the Swabian period. Less progress has by contrast been made in the archaeology of architecture which up until now has been mainly focussed upon urban fortifications.<sup>16</sup>

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in Jacques Heers, ed., *Fortifications, portes de ville, places publiques dans le monde méditerranéen*, (Paris, 1984), pp. 41–58; “Spazio e potere nella Palermo medievale,” in Cataldo Roccaro, ed., *Palermo medievale, Schede Medievali* 30–31 (1996), 7–18. For a discussion of the elites between the Norman and the Aragonese period see Laura Sciascia, *Le donne e i cavalieri, gli affanni e gli agi: famiglia e potere in Sicilia tra XII e XIV secolo* (Messina, 1993). On the *forma urbis*: Franco D'Angelo, “La città di Palermo tra la fine dell'età araba e la fine dell'età normanna,” in id., *La città di Palermo nel Medioevo* (Palermo, 2002), pp. 7–33; Id., “La Palermo araba del XII secolo descritta da Hugo Falcandus,” *Schede medievali* 47 (2009), 153–76. On the restructuring of the city between the Islamic period and the Vespers: Marina Scarlata, *Caratterizzazione dei quartieri e rapporti di vicinato a Palermo fra XII e XIV secolo*, in *D'une ville à l'autre: structures matérielles et organisation de l'espace dans les villes européennes (XIII<sup>e</sup>–XVI<sup>e</sup> siècles)*, *Atti del Convegno di Roma 1986* (Rome, 1989) pp. 681–709; ead., “Configurazione urbana e habitat a Palermo tra XII e XIII secolo,” in *Storia di Palermo III, Dai Normanni al Vespro* (Palermo, 2003), pp. 134–81; ead., “Una Chalke a Palermo?”, *Nea Rhome. Rivista di ricerche bizantinistiche*, 4 (2007), pp. 217–37, ead., “Lo spazio del potere civile e religioso nella Palermo normanna. S. Maria dell'Ammiraglio, S. Maria del Cancelliere, Santa Maria la Nuova o dei Marturano,” in Mario Re and Cristina Rognoni, eds., *Byzantino-Sicula V, Giorgio di Antiochia. L'arte della politica in Sicilia nel XII secolo tra Bisanzio e l'Islam. Atti del Convegno Internazionale (Palermo 19–20 aprile 2007)*.

<sup>14</sup> Adalgisa De Simone, “Palermo araba. Custodia Panormi est: intra baych et ferach...”, in Rosario la Duca, ed., *Storia di Palermo II, Dal tardo-antico all'Islam* (Palermo, 2000), pp. 78–113, and Bagnera and Nef, ‘Histoire et archéologie du domaine fatimide’.

<sup>15</sup> Aldo Casamento, *La rettificazione della strada del Cassaro di Palermo: una esemplare realizzazione urbanistica nell'Europa del Cinquecento* (Palermo, 2000) and Maurizio Vesco, *Viridaria e città: lottizzazioni a Palermo nel '500* (Rome, 2010).

<sup>16</sup> Valeria Brunazzi, “L'epoca della costruzione delle mura urbane di Palermo e annotazioni sul rilievo di un loro tratto,” in *Palermo medievale*, pp. 65–72, and Sciortino, “Archeologia del sistema fortificato.”

## AFTER THE NORMAN CONQUEST (SEE FIG. 7.2)

There is very little information regarding the early Norman period, almost all of it inferred from narratives dealing with the conquest of Sicily; we lack documentary data and architectonic structures have not been preserved. All that we can hope to do is to reconstruct the largescale interventions attributable to the political authorities, whilst the urban fabric and the warp and weft of social structures wholly elude us.

We know that the Normans had captured a great city, which was opulent though sorely tested by decades of political instability, and ruled by a city council with which the surrender had been negotiated. According to the terms of the surrender, the city's Muslim inhabitants would retain their own laws and liberty, in return for which they would pay tribute and remain loyal.<sup>17</sup> Contracts in Arabic testify to the retention of Islamic law and to the respect shown for its principles in the private sphere throughout the Norman period,<sup>18</sup> while various sources attest the preservation of some Muslim places of worship.<sup>19</sup>

Following the general tenor of the narratives recounting the capture of the city,<sup>20</sup> the historiography concurs in ascribing the earliest urban transformations to Robert Guiscard (living 1020–1085). Such interventions were designed to give concrete expression to the new political dispensation in urban space, and to ensure that the Normans retained military control over the city. They were aimed at the strategically most sensitive points, both from a “functional” and from a symbolic point of view, namely, the fortifications and the principal place of worship in the city. The very first action taken by Robert Guiscard was to affirm the importance of the Christian religion: the ancient Byzantine episcopal basilica, which in the Islamic period had been turned into a mosque<sup>21</sup> (although it apparently retained some memory traces of its earlier Christian existence),<sup>22</sup> was reinstated as a place of Christian worship.

<sup>17</sup> Malaterra XLV, p. 53; see Annliese Nef, *Conquérir et gouverner*, p. 38.

<sup>18</sup> Nef, *Conquérir et gouverner*, p. 568.

<sup>19</sup> See below.

<sup>20</sup> See more recently Scarlata, “Configurazione urbana,” pp. 139–47, which devotes a great deal of space to a reconstruction of the various stages of the siege and of the capture of the city.

<sup>21</sup> Amato di Montecassino, p. 282 XVIII; Guglielmo di Puglia, *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*, ed. Marguerite Mathieu (Palermo, 1961), III, vv. 331–336, pp. 182–83.

<sup>22</sup> Even as late as 973 Ibn Hawqal recalled that the mosque had formerly been a basilica, and saw still visible signs of its previous state in the tomb of Aristotle (*BAS* it., 1: 11).

The conquerors then consolidated their military control of the city.<sup>23</sup> One has to bear in mind that here a small band of Norman and Christian military men were holding by armed force a hostile city with a predominantly Arabo-Muslim population.<sup>24</sup> The sources contemporary with the conquest are not clear as to the system employed to guarantee such control, though Amato di Montecassino relates that a castle had been built in a prominent position, while Malaterra speaks of the reinforcing of a castle, and Guglielmo Apulo uses the term *castra* in the plural.<sup>25</sup> A 12th-century source, however, the Anonimo Vaticano, differentiates between two castral structures:<sup>26</sup> the *castrum superius* or *novum*, built in the far west of the city, at the highest point of the ancient fortified urban centre, controlling access from the hinterland, and the *castrum vetus*, a fortified structure situated at the northern entrance to the port and the first nucleus of which would presumably date to the Islamic period, given that a fortified structure is marked on the map from the *Kitāb Gharā'ib* at the corresponding place.<sup>27</sup> Thereby following a logic of settlement frequently encountered in the cities of southern Italy and of Sicily conquered by the Normans,<sup>28</sup> the conquerors occupied positions on the periphery but which were strategically useful both for ensuring control of the city and for defending themselves against external threats, and, in the last resort, for keeping open a line of flight. It is moreover highly probable that the *castrum superius* or *novum*, the first nucleus of what would later become

<sup>23</sup> Sciortino, "Archeologia del sistema fortificato," pp. 286–89.

<sup>24</sup> Amato di Montecassino, Guglielmo di Puglia and the Anonimo Vaticano are extremely clear in this regard: "He chooses a very lofty site upon which to build a strong castle and he ensures that it is well defended and he furnishes it with abundant supplies that will last for a long period" (Amato di Montecassino XXIII, p. 285). "He has the castles defended with solidly built walls to protect his armies from the Sicilians and he adds wells and food" (William of Puglia, *Gesta*, III, v 337–339); "in order to remove any possibility of attack, they built two well-defended castles in a short space of time, one near to the sea and one in a place called Galea" (Anonimo Vaticano, *Historia Sicula ab ingressu Normanorum in Apulia usque ad annum 1282*, ed. Johanne Baptista Carusio, RIS (Milan, 1726), VIII, p. 846.

<sup>25</sup> See the previous note. "The castle having been reinforced" (Malaterra XLV, p. 53).

<sup>26</sup> See above, note 24.

<sup>27</sup> *Kitāb Gharā'ib*, p. 444, n.101. On the two castles see Ferdinando Maurici, "I castelli normanni," in *Storia di Palermo III* pp. 66–82. On the *Castrum Superius*, Vladimir Zorić, "Arx preclara quam Palatium regale appellant. Le sue origini e la prima Cappella della corte normanna," in Franco D'Angelo, ed., *La città di Palermo nel Medioevo* (Palermo, 2002), pp. 95–106.

<sup>28</sup> Paolo Delogu, "I Normanni e le città," in *Società potere e popolo nell'età di Ruggero II (Atti delle III giornate normanno-sveve, Bari, maggio 1977)* (Bari, 1979), pp. 192–194; Lucio Santoro, "Castelli nell'Italia Meridionale," in *I normanni popolo d'Europa, 1030–1200*, ed. Mario D'Onofrio (Padova, 1994), p. 210.

the royal palace of Roger II, had been built right up against, or enclosing, the only gate of the Islamic city of which there is no trace in the late medieval documentation, the Bāb al-Riyād.<sup>29</sup> This gate—built shortly after the middle of the 10th century, by the emir Abū 'l-Ḥusayn Aḥmad b. Ḥasan b. Abī 'l-Ḥusayn—guaranteed access to the city from the west, where there were to be found the “delightful” gardens which the Normans divided up amongst themselves before entering Palermo and which subsequently, having been ringed by an extensive wall, became an integral part of the system of royal residences.<sup>30</sup>

After the conquest, the city was entrusted to a Norman *amêras*<sup>31</sup> and to a garrison. The sources also speak of the city being divided up between the two Hauteville brothers,<sup>32</sup> a detail confirmed both by documents<sup>33</sup> and by monetary issues.<sup>34</sup>

A policy of wholesale confiscation was also probably put in train: al-Nuwayrī relates that Roger, once Sicily had been conquered, “reigned over the whole island; in which he garrisoned the Rum and the Franks

<sup>29</sup> In Capua and Salerno the Norman castles were likewise built near to a city gate: Delogu, “I Normanni e le città,” p. 192.

<sup>30</sup> F. D'Angelo has recently argued that the Bāb al-Riyād was situated a little to the north of the present-day Porta Nuova (Id., “Il Cassaro,” *Per salvare Palermo: Giornale della Fondazione Salvare Palermo onlus*, (maggio-agosto 2012). Conversely, A. Bagnera maintains that the gate served to link *Balarm* and the area of the *Mu'askar*, which was rich in gardens, and opened out at the far end of the *simāt* in a position analogous to that occupied by the Porta Nuova in relation to the present-day corso Vittorio Emanuele (Bagnera, in Bagnera and Nef, ‘Histoire et archéologie du domaine fatimide’).

<sup>31</sup> Jeremy Johns, *Arabic Administration in Norman Sicily. The Royal Dīwān* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 68–69; Nef, *Conquérir et gouverner*, p. 310. As regards the function of the *amêras*, in this case probably at the head of the armies and of the civil administration, and on the evolution of the office in the Norman period see most recently Nef, *Conquérir et gouverner*, pp. 308ff.

<sup>32</sup> According to Malaterra, Roberto Guiscard, after the conquest, conceded to his brother Roger all of Sicily apart from Palermo, which remained “in suam proprietatem.” To judge by some codices, it would seem to be the case that in 1091 Roger obtained half of Palermo from Robert’s heir (Malaterra, XLV, p. 53, XVII p. 96, nota 1). According to Amato di Montecassino, Robert Guiscard gave the whole of Sicily to his brother but retained possession of half of Palermo, Messina and Demede (Amato di Montecassino, XXI, p. 283).

<sup>33</sup> Vera von Falkenhausen, “I logoteti greci nel regno normanno. Uno studio prosopografico,” in Pietro Corrao and Ennio Igor Mineo, eds., *Dentro e fuori la Sicilia. Studi di storia per Vincenzo D'Alessandro* (Rome, 2009), p. 104. Three Latin diplomas by Ruggero Borsa were drafted in Palermo in August 1086, one of them in favour of the archbishop of Palermo, Archerius (Léon-Robert Ménager, *Recueil des actes des ducs normands d'Italie (1042–1127). I. Les premiers ducs (1046–1087)*, Società per la storia patria per la Puglia (Documenti e monografie 45) (Bari, 1981), nn. 52–54.

<sup>34</sup> The coins of the early Norman period of the Palermo mint were in fact issued both by Robert Guiscard and Ruggero Borsa, and by Roger I and Roger II: Franco D'Angelo, “Palermo (Sicilia),” in Lucia Travaini, ed., *Le zecche italiane fino all'Unità* (Rome, 2011), p. 968.

along with the Muslims, not leaving any of the inhabitants a bath, shop, mill or oven."<sup>35</sup> Indeed, numerous documentary testimonies, whether from the 12th century or later, attest that the public baths, the mills,<sup>36</sup> some shops and some ovens<sup>37</sup> were in the royal demesne.

We do not know what sort of impact the garrison and the Norman *amêras* had upon the urban structure, nor do we know if and how, in the first decades of the conquest, the make-up of the population altered greatly, yet all in all we may presume that Palermo retained the features of an Islamic city, though under Christian control, just as the cities of the Maghreb conquered by Roger II, a little more than fifty years after the capture of Palermo, would retain them.<sup>38</sup>

Already in this phase there occurred an exodus of the Muslim elites, but it is unclear on what scale.<sup>39</sup> It is possible that some of the urban residences remained empty and were requisitioned. Moreover, the transformation of the *jāmi'* mosque into a cathedral must have entailed the singling out of a new congregational mosque whose exact site cannot be identified but to which Ibn Jubayr refers, in 1184.<sup>40</sup>

We may assume that a greater influence than before was now exerted by the community of Christians following the Greek rite, who were Arabic-speaking and Islamic in culture, and whose presence is attested prior to the Norman conquest.<sup>41</sup> In the Islamic period this community, led by a

<sup>35</sup> BAS it., 2: 145–6. Adalgisa De Simone, "Il Mezzogiorno normanno svevo visto dall'Islam africano," in Giosuè Musca, ed., *Il mezzogiorno normanno svevo visto dall'Europa e dal mondo mediterraneo (Atti delle XIII giornate normanno-sveve. Bari 21–24 ottobre 1997)* (Bari, 1999), p. 269.

<sup>36</sup> The instrument of endowment of the Cappella Palatina grants the rents from the city's mills, *Codex Diplomaticus Regni Siciliae, Series I, tomus II/I, Rogerii II. Regis Diplomata latina*, ed. Carlrichard Brühl, (Cologne, Weimar and Vienna, 1987), 48, pp. 133–37 (Palermo 1140.04.28).

<sup>37</sup> An oven that was *despoticu*, that is, belonging to the royal demesne, is mentioned in a document of 1191 (Cusa, pp. 123–24).

<sup>38</sup> Bresc, "Filologia urbana," p. 9 and id., "Le royaume normand d'Afrique et l'archevêché de Mahdiyya," in Id., *Una stagione* p. 107: at Mahdiyya too the cathedral was transferred into the great mosque (p. 107). As regards the various solutions adopted by the Normans to hold on to the conquered cities on the coast of Ifrīqiya see De Simone, "Il mezzogiorno normanno svevo," pp. 274–75.

<sup>39</sup> Laura Sciascia, "Palermo e il mare," in Giosuè Musca, ed., *Itinerari e centri urbani nel mezzogiorno normanno-svevo (Atti delle X giornate normanno-sveve, Bari 21–24 ottobre 1991)* (Bari, 1993), pp. 59–60, cites the poets with reference to a diaspora from early Norman Sicily.

<sup>40</sup> BAS it., 1: 161.

<sup>41</sup> Henri Bresc, "Arab Christians in the Western Mediterranean," *Library of Mediterranean History* I (1994), pp. 3–45; Henri Bresc and Annliese Nef, "Les mozarabes de Sicile (1100–1300)," in Enrico Cuzzo and Jean-Marie Martin, eds., *Cavalieri alla conquista del*

bishop, had had its own places of worship,<sup>42</sup> and presumably had preserved some memory of a Christian past discernible both in the *jāmi'* mosque and in the toponomastics of the older nucleus of the city (porta Sant'Agata). We do not know where the places of Christian worship in Islamic Palermo were, though very probably, in addition to the Church of St. Cyriac,<sup>43</sup> where the bishop was officiating at the time of the conquest, there was, along the river Kemonia, an area affected by a Christian presence.<sup>44</sup> It is possible that after the conquest some of these places of worship were monumentalised, just as it is possible that there were new foundations behind the two *castra*, in one case perhaps substituting for or close to a mosque.<sup>45</sup>

A few, scattered elements testify that the city was attracting a population from outside. Merchants from the seafaring cities of the mainland may also have settled in greater numbers, among them the Amalfitans, who lived in the area around the port of Palermo (as early as the end of the 10th century?),<sup>46</sup> and perhaps the Venetians, Pisans and Genoese,

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*Sud: Studi sull'Italia normanna in memoria di Léon-Robert Ménager* (Rome and Bari, 1998), pp. 134–56; Annliese Nef, "L'histoire des 'mozarabes' de Sicile. Bilan provisoire et nouveaux matériaux," in Cyrille Aillet, Mayte Penelas and Philippe Roisse, eds., *¿Existe una identidad mozárabe? Historia, lengua y cultura de los cristianos de al-Andalus (siglos IX–XII)*, Collection de la Casa de Velázquez 101 (Madrid, 2008), pp. 255–86; Giuseppe Mandalà, "Una famiglia di marmorari arabo-cristiani nella Palermo normanno-sveva," in Marcello Moscone and Giuseppe Mandalà, "Tra latini, greci e arabici: ricerche su scrittura e cultura a Palermo tra XII e XIII secolo," *Segno e testo* 7 (2009), 174–231.

<sup>42</sup> The Normans had in fact found a Greek archbishop officiating in a small church dedicated to St. Cyriac (Malaterra XLV, p. 53); this archbishop has been identified as Nicodemus, who was succeeded as early as 1083 by a French prelate, Alcherius; most recently Mario Re, "La sottoscrizione del *Vat.gr.* 2294 (ff.68–16): il copista Matteo sacerdote e la chiesa di S. Giorgio *de Balatis* (Palermo 1260–61). Con una nota sulla presenza greca nella Palermo del Duecento," *Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Neellenici* n.s. 42 (2005), pp. 181–82.

<sup>43</sup> For a hypothesis regarding the siting of this church outside the city: Scarlata, "Configurazione urbana," p. 147.

<sup>44</sup> See below.

<sup>45</sup> Nel 1081, a new church, dedicated to Saints Peter and Paul, was founded, close to Castello a Mare, by a Greek functionary, Nicola, son of di Leone. This was the church of San Pietro la Bagnara, now demolished. The dedicatory epigraph is preserved in the Galleria Regionale in the Palazzo Abatellis: Benedetto Rocco, "Lapidi e cofani – Serie II," in *L'età normanna e sveva in Sicilia, Mostra storico-documentaria e bibliografica (Palazzo dei normanni, Palermo 1994)* (Palermo, 1994), pp. 144–45. The church of Saints Peter and Paul may have been built on the site of an earlier mosque or, like the church of the Monastery of San Salvatore (see below), alongside it. In actual fact, in the nineteenth century, during the demolition of the church, Di Giovanni would seem to have identified on the site the outlines of a mosque—even if it is not clear on what foundations—and even traces of baths that were "Roman," that is, with *suspensurae* (Di Giovanni, I, pp. 191–92).

<sup>46</sup> Bresc, "Filologia urbana," p. 12.

whose presence is attested in the second half of the 12th century but whose interests may have been promoted still earlier. Finally, we do not know whether in this phase the Christian Latin elites had already begun to establish a presence in the area between the *castrum superius* and the cathedral.

To sum up, in the early Norman period Palermo was an Islamic city under the military and political supervision of a Christian elite. However, one may assume that the process of transformation of the social fabric and of a part of the urban structures was not initiated before the transfer of the capital of the Norman countship of Sicily from Messina to Palermo (before 1112).<sup>47</sup> Such a process must have accelerated when, in 1122, the whole city of Palermo came under the control of Roger II, and, above all, in 1130, with the coronation of Roger II as *Rex Siciliae Ducatus Apulie et Principatus Capue*, when it became the capital of a kingdom extending from Sicily to southern Italy.

#### THE CAPITAL OF THE NORMAN KINGDOM: THE SOVEREIGN'S INTERVENTIONS

In 1112, Palermo, earlier a count's seat, was still divided between Roger, count of Sicily, and William II, duke of Puglia; only in 1122 did this latter sell to the former the half of the city which by hereditary right belonged to him.<sup>48</sup> However, up until his coronation in 1130, Roger spent little time in Palermo.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, it was only from this date that the city assumed the complex structure of a capital: it became the residence of a court of which important functionaries with government offices formed a part, and around which gravitated both intellectuals of diverse origins and the military aristocracy of the Regnum, the "Norman barons;" it also became the headquarters of structured administrative offices where Arabs, Greeks and Latins of diverse origins and formations worked side by side. It is to Roger and his successors that we owe the most far-reaching interventions, but a crucial contribution to the transformation of the city's physiognomy was also due to the presence in Palermo of men active at court and in administrative posts.

<sup>47</sup> *Codex Diplomaticus Regni Siciliae*, cit. n. 36, 3, pp. 6–8, 1112.06.12.

<sup>48</sup> Johns, *Arabic Administration*, pp. 68–9.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 78–79.



In the sixty-year span extending from the 1130s to the 1180s interventions by the central power intensified and were concentrated in a series of building projects associated with the representation and legitimisation of the new dynasty. Around 1140 the *castrum superius* became the *sacrum palacium*,<sup>50</sup> a complex structure to which new elements were gradually added, and of which today only a part survives. In the fashioning of a new image of the royal power, the vast gardens, located outside the walls and constituting almost an extension of the palace,<sup>51</sup> had an important role to play.

One can advance the hypothesis, subject to archaeological verification, that between the 1130s and 1140s, that is, when the *castrum superius* became the *sacrum palacium*, a large-scale urbanistic intervention was put into effect, namely, the delimitation of an area corresponding to the western portion of the ancient city and including within it the royal palace with its annexes. This area, called the Galka,<sup>52</sup> was defined by a wall running north-south—whose precise course has not been identified—<sup>53</sup> that left the cathedral outside of the fortified perimeter. The cathedral's position could at the same time have determined the extension of the Galka: the church would seem in point of fact to have served as a sort of hinge, an integral part of the fabric of the city and accessible to its population but in direct contact with the citadel.

<sup>50</sup> *Codex Diplomaticus Regni Siciliae*: the palace was associated with the term *regale* in 1140, 48, pp. 133–137, and with the term *sacrum* from 1145, 69, pp. 201–202.

<sup>51</sup> Henri Bresc, “Les jardins royaux de Palerme,” *MEFRM* 106 (1994/1), 239–258.

<sup>52</sup> The dating of this area to the Norman period is confirmed by documentary evidence: the first mention of the Galka, as far as I can make out, is in 1153 (Cusa, pp. 31–33); whereas a document from 1137 (Cusa pp. 61–67) suggests that the wall delimiting the Galka had not yet been built. The document mentions the street which runs from the gate named Bāb al-Abnā’ to the gate known as Bāb al-Sūdān, a link that, after the building of the wall of the Galka, was no longer possible, because the same street was blocked by a further gate, the *Galke* gate to which reference is made in the document cited from 1153. In 1183, the same street, called *shāri’*, descends “from the gate that stood at the side of the church of San Costantino” (Cusa, pp. 109–110). The phase of sudden abandonment documented by the waste material from the wells discovered in the course of the excavations at the Archbishop's Palace—which have recovered pottery from the end of the 11th and the first half of the 12th centuries—can be related to the restructuring of the area undertaken in order to define the bounds of the Galka. For the waste material see Francesca Spatafora, Laura Di Leonardo and Emanuele Canzoneri, “Ceramica da mensa nella Palermo di XI secolo: dalla fornace al butto,” in *Il bello dei butti*, in press.

<sup>53</sup> The only trace was discovered in the course of the excavations carried out by A. Salinas in the present-day piazza Vittoria: Antonino Salinas, “Scoperta di antichità in Piazza Vittoria,” in *Notizie degli scavi di Antichità* (1904), p. 458.

The internal structure of the Galka can in part be reconstructed through documents: the roads network was that of the Qaşr al-qadim/Cassaro and the western stretches of the *ruga marmorea*, of the north *shera*—which was assuming the name of *via coperta* (covered way)—and of the south *shera* lay within the Galka; these streets were crossed by at least one road transecting them at right angles and running from north to south. There was also a minor roads network to which the documents refer. The main thoroughfares running from east to west were blocked off to the east, where the Galka's boundary wall was, by gates. The sources thus refer to the *porta Coperti* or *porta Galkule*, next to the *via coperta*, and to the *porta Galke*, also called "gate on the side of St. Constantine's" and subsequently *porta Trabocchetti*,<sup>54</sup> next to the south *shera*. The other means of access to the Galka corresponded to the old gates in the ancient walls: the palace area had a privileged entrance along the southern wall at the Bāb al-Abnā', later called, significantly enough, *porta Palacii*, which offered supervised access to the city,<sup>55</sup> while in the north-western stretch of the walls one might enter by the *porta Rote*.

A sizeable portion of the Galka was occupied by the Palace and its annexes: the *Sala verde* and the Palace of the Slaves. The *via coperta*,<sup>56</sup> therefore a monumentalised route, linked the royal palace and the cathedral. Inside the Galka there was a remarkable concentration of religious buildings<sup>57</sup> and scattered across it were the houses of a part of the Christian elites, of the functionaries attached to the palace and of the canons of the Cappella Palatina. The few documents from the Norman period relating to property located in the area record *hospitia despotiria*,<sup>58</sup> that is, belonging to the royal demesne, houses of the chancel of the

<sup>54</sup> Cusa, pp. 109–110. ASP, *Spezzoni Notarili*, 229N 1343 notary Philippus de Biffardo, c. 8v.: sale of a *domus* located in *quarterio Chalke* near to the *Trabucketti* gate and leaning against the walls of the aforesaid quarter.

<sup>55</sup> Ibn Jubayr "We set out on the road to Palermo. But when we were just about to enter, they prohibited us from doing so and conducted us to a gate adjoining the castle of the Frankish king, may god liberate the Muslims from his domination. We were led first of all to his *mustahlaf* (commissioner) so that he might interrogate us as to the purpose of our journey, as is the custom here with all wayfarers" (*BAS* it., 1: 155–156).

<sup>56</sup> As regards the palace, see Di Liberto in the present volume.

<sup>57</sup> On the south frontage of the Via Marmorea the churches of Santa Barbara, Santa Maria la Pinta and San Giovanni were built, while further south there were the churches of San Costantino (Cusa, pp. 109–110, 1183) and of Santa Maria dell'Itria. In the area lying between the *via marmorea* and the north walls the churches of Santa Maddalena, San Paolo, San Giacomo la Mazara, San Bartolomeo de Coperto, Santa Barbara, Santa Trinità, and San Nicola dei poveri (Cusa, pp. 92–93, 1236) were built.

<sup>58</sup> Cusa, pp. 74–75, 1166.

cappella Palatina,<sup>59</sup> and in addition they mention, among the property-owners, the *milites castr*i Avenel of Petralia, William of Paleocastro, Ansaldus *magister* of the *Castrum Superius Panormi*, and his equerry Gerardo. In the covered way stood the house of Atenulf *camerarius*.<sup>60</sup> A passage in the Pseudo-Falcandus, the author of a chronicle which describes events in the Kingdom from the death of Roger II to the death of William II, allows us to discern the relative homogeneity of the group installed in the Galka and the relationships of solidarity that bound them together when, in regard to the conspiracy of Matthew Bonellus against William I (1161), he asserts that the greater part of the inhabitants in the area around the covered way and the upper part of the via Marmorea “had together sworn a pact.”<sup>61</sup>

The historiography does not agree either about the chronology or about the function of the Galka, nor is there a consensus regarding the etymology of the name. Scholars have long identified it with the original nucleus of the city, the *paleapolis* mentioned in the ancient sources, and have acknowledged the sala verde and the covered way to be derived from structures dating back to Roman times.<sup>62</sup> More recently, however, the case has been made for a date in the Norman period,<sup>63</sup> and one confirmed by the silence of the Islamic sources: the Galka is indeed missing from the

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<sup>59</sup> Garofalo, *Tabularium regiae ac Imperialis Cappellae Collegiatae divi Petri in Regio Panormitano Palatio* (Palermo, 1835), X, p. 24, 1167.

<sup>60</sup> Falcando, c. 17, p. 49.

<sup>61</sup> Falcando, c. 51, p. 156.

<sup>62</sup> Di Giovanni, I pp. 371–437, Gaetano Columba “Note di topografia medievale palermitana,” in *Archivio Storico Siciliano*, n.s. XXXV (1910), 420–26. The term has at the same time been interpreted as deriving from the Arabic *halqa* (‘circle’) or *ghalqa* (‘enclosed place’), see Caracausi “Arabismi” pp. 235–37, but recently M. Scarlata, (Scarlata, “Una Chalke”) though prudently and without altogether abandoning the above hypothesis, has argued that the name Galka or Calka derived from the Greek Chalkè (literally, bronze), a term used to designate the monumental vestibule of the imperial palace of Constantinople in the reconstruction proposed by C. Mango for the Justinian phase. The author has an open mind as to whether the Galka should be attributed to the Byzantine period, but nor does she wholly rule out the possibility that a Norman layout was involved; to sum up, she, like Di Giovanni, sees the Galka as the monumental heart of the ancient city, containing buildings (the Sala Verde, the covered way) that had survived up until the Norman period. We can, however, rule out the possibility that the covered way—of which there are many traces in the sources but up until now no actual remains, and we also lack a description enabling us to grasp what structure it had—was the continuation of an ancient colonnaded street. For the latter hypothesis cannot be sustained once a comparison is made with examples of Roman and Byzantine colonnaded streets, and with their distribution across the Mediterranean. On colonnaded streets, see Giorgio Bejor, *Vie colonnate. Paesaggi urbani del mondo antico*, *Rivista di archeologia*. Supplementi 22 (Rome, 1999).

<sup>63</sup> Bresc, “Spazio e potere,” p. 12; D’Angelo, “Il Cassaro,” Zoric, “*Arx preclara*,” p. 90.

map in the *Kitāb Gharā'ib*, even though it appears to record all the macroscopic elements in the urban landscape such as walls and gates.

For this intervention on an urban scale which appreciably modified a broad sector of the city, the Normans, in Henri Bresc's opinion, must have revived a model already present in Palermo itself, namely, the Khālīṣa, the palatine city of the Kalbid emirs. Like the latter, the Galka would have been a royal city "without a market, and rich in symbolic elements, churches and palaces."<sup>64</sup> If the documentary data confirm this hypothesis, they do nevertheless not allow us to extend to the whole of the Galka the value possessed by royal palaces and palatine cities in the Islamic world of being structures representing the sovereign power. The Galka was thus employed as a topographic reference, but is missing from the descriptions of the city, unless one chooses to discern a mention of it in the new *ḥiṣn* that Roger had built and to which al-Idrīsī refers. Furthermore, the name, very probably derived from the Arabic term *ghalqa* ('enclosed place')—the use of which to designate a fortified place is attested in Sicily by the toponym '*contrada Galcat elmurabat*' near Carini (PA)—<sup>65</sup> also refers to a structure in which the functional aspect prevails over the symbolic.<sup>66</sup> Taken as a whole, the Galka remains an open problem whose solution we must entrust to archaeological research.

### *The City*

Aside from the Galka, the zone of the city affected most directly, or perhaps in a manner more visible to us, by the transformations linked to the new condition of the capital is the Qaṣr al-qadīm/Cassaro. Here the inhabited area, insofar as the documents allow us to see it, reflect in part the composite structure of the Norman court. It was in the Cassaro that the great functionaries, the members of the Greek and Latin clergy and of the military aristocracy would establish their own city residences, and it was likewise in the Cassaro that the ecclesiastical foundations promoted by the sovereigns or by prominent figures at court were concentrated.<sup>67</sup> Yet the representatives of the principal Arabo-Muslim lineages linked

<sup>64</sup> Bresc, "Spazio e potere," p. 12.

<sup>65</sup> ASP, *Tabulario della Magione* 12, Palermo 1202 April; Mandalà "Una famiglia," p. 230.

<sup>66</sup> Structures representing power and imbued with a strong symbolic value had names such as al-Khālīṣa, that is, "the chosen" or "the pure," and the Zisa, that is, "the splendid."

<sup>67</sup> Bresc in the present volume.

to the Norman court,<sup>68</sup> the great merchants, and broad swathes of the general Muslim population continued to live there, at any rate up until the 1160s. However, I will first of all attempt to view the city as a whole, starting with the geographers and the narrative sources, and placing a particular emphasis upon the changes that were under way, before going on to consider the different quarters into which it was divided.

First and foremost, it is worth emphasising the fact that in a span of fifty years, extending from the end of Roger II's reign to the very beginning of the Swabian period, there are clustered three descriptions and one iconographic representation of Palermo, albeit in the context of works of a wider scope: the *Kitāb nuzhat al-mushtaq fī ikhtirāq al-afāq* (*The entertainment of one who delights in his peregrination through the world*) of al-Idrīsī,<sup>69</sup> Ibn Jubayr's account of his journey, that is, *Rihla*,<sup>70</sup> the *Epistola ad Petrum Panormitanum Ecclesie Thesaurarium de calamitate Sicilie* (*Letter to Peter the Treasurer of the Palermitan church on the calamity of Sicily*)<sup>71</sup> and the *Liber ad honorem Augusti* of Peter of Eboli.<sup>72</sup> To these one should add the evocation of urban milieux in the *Zahr* (*The Flower*) of Ibn Qalāqis.<sup>73</sup> This high concentration of sources is evidence in itself, and testifies to a particular season in the life of the city, if one reflects upon the fact that one has to wait over two and a half centuries before it again became possible to read, in the pages of Pietro Ranzano, a description of Palermo. In the second half of the 12th century Palermo seems to have generated descriptions exalting the refined urban dimension which the court engendered and the city embodied.

Moreover, beneath the two different languages, Arabic and Latin, beneath the rhetorical apparatus and the topoi of two different literary cultures, one may recognise in the sources some common elements which seem in fact to characterise the landscape of the city. The city of al-Idrīsī, a place "that seduces," or the city of Ibn Jubayr, which "rises up before you

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<sup>68</sup> On this presence see Nef, *Conquérir et gouverner*, pp. 324–28. According to Nef, one can assume a more prominent presence of these personages at court than one might at first suppose.

<sup>69</sup> *BAS* it., 1: 31–133.

<sup>70</sup> *BAS* it., 1: 137–180.

<sup>71</sup> Salvatore Tramontana, *Lettera a un tesoriere di Palermo sulla conquista sveva di Sicilia* (Palermo, 1988).

<sup>72</sup> *Petrus de Ebulo. Liber ad honorem Augusti sive de rebus siculis. Eine Bilderchronik der Stauferzeit aus der Burgerbibliothek Bern*, eds. Theo Kölzer and Marlis Stähli (Sigmaringen, 1994).

<sup>73</sup> Adalgisa De Simone, *Splendori e misteri di Sicilia in un'opera di Ibn Qalāqis* (Soveria Manelli, 1996).

in the guise of a temptress," or the "most famous" and "glorious" city of the *Epistola ad Petrum*, has a fortified nucleus that is clearly marked out and that corresponds to the Qaṣr al-Qadīm/Cassaro, where, in addition to the royal palace there are prestigious dwellings, tall and resembling *qaṣr*-s ("palaces"). It is also a mercantile city with linear markets strung out along the major axes, and finally, it is characterised by an interpenetration of the built environment and gardens. In summary, it is still the Madīnat Ṣiqilliyya, Sicily's quintessential city, whose refined urban culture can be traced back to the Islamic capitals. It was a landscape familiar to al-Idrīsī and Ibn Jubayr, but to the author of the *Epistola ad Petrum* it seemed exotic. Yet since the texts are distributed in an arc across the second half of the 12th century and since they also allow us to discern a chronological development, it is appropriate to analyse them individually, reconciling them with the *Liber de Regno Sicilie* of the Pseudo-Falcandus.

If one sets to one side the part devoted to the royal palace with its chapel, and the mention of the *jāmi'* mosque later turned into a cathedral, the words that al-Idrīsī, Roger II's geographer, employs serve only to describe an Islamic city,<sup>74</sup> and indeed follow specific topoi recurrent in the geographical literature in the Arabic language.<sup>75</sup> At the same time he furnishes precise information: he tells us how the Fatimid citadel came to be incorporated into the fabric of the city, he confirms that there was a hierarchy of quarters, identifying in the Cassaro the most built-up urban area and the one that is most monumental in character, he confirms the presence of the markets and emphasises the porous nature of the settlement outside

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<sup>74</sup> The Cassaro "embraces three quarters the middle one of which bristles with towering palaces and lofty and noble buildings—mosques, *funduqs*, baths and shops of great merchants. Nor do the other two quarters lack tall palaces, sumptuous buildings, *funduqs* and baths in great numbers. In this same Cassaro is to be found the *jāmi'* mosque, which once was a Christian Church and today has returned [to the worship] the ancients devoted to it..." "strictly speaking, the township is another city which surrounds the ancient one on all sides. Then the second old city which is called al-Halisah where the sultan stayed with his optimates at the time in which the Muslims held sway, and there was the Bab al-bahr (gate of the sea) and the arsenal used for [ship-]building... The township surrounding the old Cassaro... covers a large area of ground. It is full of *funduqs*, houses, baths, shops and markets, and defended by wall, ditch and rampart. Within this township there are many gardens; beautiful town-houses and canals of sweet running water, brought in to the city from the mountains ringing its plain" (*BAS* it., 1: 60).

<sup>75</sup> On city descriptions: Paolo Cuneo, *Storia dell'urbanistica. Il mondo islamico* (Bari, 1986), pp. 9–14. As regards al-Idrīsī's method, see Henri Bresc and Annliese Nef, "Présentation," in Idrīsī, *La première géographie de l'Occident* (Paris, 1999), and in particular, on his description of Sicily and Palermo, p. 43.

the Cassaro, where the gardens, irrigated by ditches, are an integral part of the landscape. He does not refer to the population, or to its distribution.

By contrast, the Pseudo-Falcando does speak indirectly of the population. This same writer recounts the first massacre of the Muslims following Matthew Bonellus' revolt in 1161: the Latin knights having sallied forth from Castello a mare killed the court eunuchs, the Muslims selling goods in their shops, those who collected taxes in the *dīwān* and likewise those whom they encountered in the street. Realising that resistance was futile, the Muslims then abandoned their houses, for the most part in the centre of the city, and took refuge in the quarter to the north of the river Rota/Papireto.<sup>76</sup> The Pseudo-Falcando for his part traced the profile of a city in which the markets, but also some of the financial offices, were in the hands of Muslims. These latter also lived in the ancient city, alongside the Christian elites, and the massacre of 1161 seems to have precipitated, or perhaps accelerated, the Muslim population's abandonment of the Cassaro and a process whereby settlements of homogeneous groups were constituted.<sup>77</sup>

Such modifications in the distribution of the population are confirmed by Ibn Jubayr, who, in 1184, describes a set-up altogether changed from that attested by al-Idrīsī. Palermo here is a city occupied by a strong political authority, exercising a capillary form of control, such that all foreigners are conducted to the palace and interrogated by the *mustahlaf* regarding the purpose of their journey. Yet it is also a city that betrays its recent passage from the *dār al-Islām* to a new political dispensation. It is hyperbolically likened to Cordoba "for the architecture in dressed stone" and for the presence there of an ancient city "right in the middle of the new one." It is the capital of a state ruled by a "polytheist" sovereign who reads and writes Arabic and "places great trust in Muslims." It is inhabited by Christians who speak Arabic, whose women dress like the Muslim women, and by Sunni Muslims who "keep most of their mosques in a good state of repair; say prayers when the *mu'adhdhin* calls; have their own townships where they live without mingling with the Christians; run the markets and they [alone] trade in them. But they do not have assemblies [of the people, on Fridays] because the *khutba* is denied them. The *khutba* is only permitted at the annual festivals and then the invocation is addressed to the Abbasid [caliph]. They have a *cadì* who settles disputes between

<sup>76</sup> Falcando c. 19, pp. 56–7.

<sup>77</sup> Sale of a house in the Cassaro by Muslims (Cusa, pp. 101–106, 1161).

them and a *jāmi'* for the festivals . . . they have countless mosques." There are few topographical references, though mention is made of the palaces of the Cassaro, which "seem like fortresses surrounded by strong walls," and of the church of Santa Maria, founded by George of Antioch, which is described in glowing terms. Then, plainly moving on from the Cassaro to the North quarter where the Muslims had taken refuge, Ibn Jubayr says that the city is divided by a limpid river (which we can identify as the Rota/Papireto) fed by four springs.<sup>78</sup>

The *Epistola ad Petrum*, written after the death of William II (1189), describes the Sicilian population as consisting of "Christians" and "Saracens," and attributes the downfall of the Regnum to the conflict between the two groups. This letter reverts to some topographic details similar to those in al-Idrīsī's description, and at the same time projects on to the topographical evidence the ideal image of a tripartite city. Moreover, with a clearly ideological intention, its description of the Cassaro confirms the composite make-up of the urban population: Christian and Muslim elites help to fashion the image of the city. Thus, the south *shera* is defined by the house of Sedictus *sarracenus*, an edifice so worthy of note as to be recalled along with that of the count of Marsico and with the church of George of Antioch.<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, at the north-eastern extremity of the *via marmorea*, "reserved for traders," the letter locates an area which still seems to be associated with the Muslim element, namely, the *palatium arabum*, and the *forum saracenorum*,<sup>80</sup> probably corresponding to the space which the map from the *Kitāb Gharā'ib al-funūn* calls *khulā'* "an open space."<sup>81</sup> The letter also adds a new element: a mercantile area located in the space between the old city and the port, where the Amalfitan merchants have a street, the *vicus amalfitanorum*.

Finally, the famous miniature from the *Liber ad honorem Augusti*<sup>82</sup> (see Fig. 10.2), which represents the city in mourning after the death of William II, confirms the image of Palermo as a city with a population that was composite and a physical aggregation of homogeneous groups. The city is seen to be divided into four main areas—Cassarum, Alza, Scerarchadium, Ideisini—each identified by name and evoked by means of a

<sup>78</sup> *BAS* it., 1: 155–163.

<sup>79</sup> The first was one of the most important barons in the kingdom; the second had been Roger II's principal adviser for almost three decades.

<sup>80</sup> Tramontana, *Lettera* p. 138.

<sup>81</sup> *Kitāb Gharā'ib*, p. 445, n. 116. Pezzini, "Madīnat Şiqilliyya." For the positing of a different location: Scarlata, "Configurazione," p. 170, D'Angelo, "Il Cassaro."

<sup>82</sup> Berne Burgerbibliothek, m.s. 120, c. 98.



population associated with its characteristic mode of dress. In the Scerarchadium and in the Ideisini we encounter representations of Muslims and Jews, whereas in the Cassarum and in the Alza we see a mixed but predominantly Christian (that is, Greek and Latin) population.

The documentary sources, together with a small amount of archaeological evidence, enhance this picture, allowing us to observe the fabric of the city more closely, in particular some areas of the Cassaro but only a few zones of the vast inhabited area within the second circuit of walls, the formation of which was due to the urban expansion of the Islamic period. Nonetheless, since the city's visibility in the Norman period is bound up with a documentation produced by the central power and by the religious foundations, we may assume that the zones left in shadow were those occupied by what remained of the Islamic city. Let us attempt to look at this question in more detail.

#### *The Qaṣr al-qadīm/Cassaro*

In the Qaṣr al-qadīm/Cassaro, as we have already noted, the main street system seems not to have been altered overmuch, and in actual fact has retained the partly preserved ancient network up until our own day,<sup>83</sup> just as the Arabic toponyms of the roads crossing the *ruga marmorea* at right angles, and of a segment of the south *shera* (Shera Buali, from Abū 'Alī), survived well into the 14th century.

The mosques, of which documentary traces endure only in this area of the city, likewise did not disappear; indeed, some of them could still be recognised as late as the 14th century, when they formed part of the patrimony of the royal curia.<sup>84</sup> In 1175 the Syrian pilgrim al-Harawī sought treatment in the hospital attached to the mosque beside the 'Ayn al-Shifā ("spring of health"), tended by Abū l-Qāsim, the head, according to Ibn Jubayr, of the Muslims on the island.<sup>85</sup> For this mosque, which was adjacent to his own house, the notary Bartolomeo Nini would in 1312 pay a rent to the curia.<sup>86</sup> The mosque and the hospital were close to the *palatium arabum* and to the *forum saracenorum* evoked by the *Letter to Peter*.

<sup>83</sup> See above note 6.

<sup>84</sup> In the list of the *Censualia ad manus curie revocata* of 1312 we find 3 *miside*: Di Giovanni II, pp. 94–96.

<sup>85</sup> D'Angelo, "La Palermo araba," p. 162, Johns, *Arabic Administration*, p. 241.

<sup>86</sup> Di Giovanni, II, p. 95; in 1309 the father of Bartolomeo Nini, Simone, had a house near to the Dark gate, that is, the Bāb al-Shifā' (ASP, *Miscellanea Archivistica II*, notary Bartolomeo de Citella, 127B, c. 139v, 10.01.1309).

The mention of al-Harawī and above all the reference to Abū l-Qāsim lead one to hypothesise that at least up until the third quarter of the 12th century this area of the Cassaro, lying between the Bāb al-shifā' and the Bāb al-baḥr, accommodated structures, perhaps belonging to the curia but bound up with the social organisation of the Muslim community. The possibility that all mosques had not been turned into churches, as Ibn Ḥamdīs laments,<sup>87</sup> but in some cases were flanked by churches, is attested by an example: the church of the Monastery of San Salvatore was built, in actual fact, alongside a mosque. This latter turns out to have been in a derelict state in 1197, when the Muslim population of the Cassaro must have been appreciably reduced.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, the sources also document the reconfiguration into churches of private mosques attached to houses belonging to members of the Muslim elites who had converted to Christianity. Thus Ibn Jubayr tells of a Muslim jurist who converted and "turned a mosque which he owned, and which stood opposite his own house, into a church."<sup>89</sup> The same transformation was presumably undergone by the mosques attached to residences which had become the property of Christians.

It is highly probable that prestigious dwellings belonging to the Muslim elites had been acquired by the royal demesne and assigned to court functionaries.<sup>90</sup> Yet we also have evidence suggesting that the newcomers obtained sizeable properties created through the amalgamation of a number of small plots of inhabited land.<sup>91</sup> It is also possible to discern a tendency towards the formation of homogeneous neighbourhood groups. Henri Bresc thus notes that the houses and properties of the "Mozarabs" tended to be clustered in the vicinity of the Galka;<sup>92</sup> whereas in 1159, near to the archbishop's palace, there could be found, adjoining one another, the houses and properties of subjects who had Norman names or who

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<sup>87</sup> "What? Have they not branded Sicily with ignominy? Have not these Christian hands turned its mosques into churches, where the friars brawl as much as they have a mind to, and set the bells chattering morning and night?", *BAS* it., 2: 315.

<sup>88</sup> Paolo De Luca, *Documenta pactensia. 2.1. L'età sveva e angiona*, Monumenta Ecclesiae Siculae I/2.1 (Messina, 2005), n. 2, pp. 10–13.

<sup>89</sup> *BAS* it., 1: 175–6.

<sup>90</sup> On the existence of properties from the royal demesne assigned to Norman functionaries see Scarlata, "Lo spazio del potere," p. 316; Vera von Falkenhausen, "I funzionari greci nel regno normanno," in *Bizantino-Sicula V*, pp. 198–99.

<sup>91</sup> Cusa, pp. 71–73, 1146.

<sup>92</sup> Bresc, "Arabi per lingua, greci," pp. 268–69.

might be traced back to the Norman aristocracy, but also those of an important family of “Mozarabs,” the Indulzi.<sup>93</sup>

Moreover, in this phase there seems already to have been a tendency—which one would also encounter in succeeding centuries—for the elites to settle against the walls, above all in close proximity to the gates and therefore in zones of crucial importance for controlling the city. In the easternmost part of the Cassaro, between the porta Iudaica and the Bebil-bakal gate, stood the houses of George of Antioch, that of the emir Eugenius, that of Maio of Bari (later passing to Silvester, count of Marsico), and that of Adelaide of Golisano (subsequently belonging to Geoffrey Martorana).<sup>94</sup> To these latter were attached the chapels of Santa Maria, Santo Stefano, and San Cataldo respectively. Along the north *shera* stood the house of Maio of Bari.<sup>95</sup>

### *The Burgus*

Outside the walls of the Cassaro, along the beds of the two rivers, there unwound a long ribbon of gardens, and beyond the rivers, within the second ring of walls, the inhabited area had probably in the main retained the layout of the late Islamic period with localised changes which the sources allow us to follow only in part.

A type of intervention registered in the sources is the foundation of Christian religious buildings. Initially these were to be found in close proximity to Castello a Mare and behind those gates of the Cassaro which were closer to the palace or to the cathedral. They were therefore located where the Christian population was most densely concentrated, and where it was perhaps possible to find a degree of protection should the need arise. However, so far as the buildings close to the gates of the Cassaro are concerned, we cannot rule out the possibility that the choice of the site of the new foundations was determined in part by an earlier Christian presence or by the memory of ancient devotional practices. To the south, immediately outside the Palace gate and therefore in relationship with it, and in the area that assumed the name of Kemonia, where scholarly tradition places the Gregorian monasteries of San Giorgio and

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<sup>93</sup> *Codex Diplomaticus Regni Siciliae, Series I, tomus III, Guillelmi I. Regis Diplomata*, ed. Horst Enzensberger (Cologne-Weimar-Vienna, 1996), 25, pp. 69–70 (Palermo, January 1159).

<sup>94</sup> Scarlata “Lo spazio del potere,” pp. 319–35.

<sup>95</sup> Tramontana, *Lettera a Pietro*, p. 138.

Sant'Ermete,<sup>96</sup> there stood the new foundations associated with the palace, namely, the Greek churches of Sant'Andrea and of San Giorgio, furnished with cemeteries for the inhabitants of the palace, and the Latin monastery of San Giovanni in Kemonia founded by Roger II.<sup>97</sup> At the time of William II, to the north of the Cassaro, outside of Sant'Agata gate—a toponym attested in the Islamic period that refers to palaeochristian worship—and along the street that descended towards the river Ruta/Papireto, Matthew of Ajello, *vicecancellarius* of the Regnum, had founded the Ognissanti hospital. This hospital was near to a public bath probably to be identified with an earlier structure, the Ḥammām 'Imrān marked in the map of the *Kitāb Gharā'ib al-funūn*.<sup>98</sup> Another hospital, founded by archbishop Walter, stood on its own in the southern district, beside Porta di Termini, and close to this latter, around 1190, Matthew of Ajello had the Cistercian monastery of the Holy Trinity built.<sup>99</sup>

Once again in a zone that could be closely supervised from a military point of view, that is, an area close to Castello a Mare, and between this latter, the arsenal and St George gate—perhaps to be identified with the Chatzerinel gate or with Bāb al-Ḥajjārīn, one of the gates that the *Kitāb Gharā'ib* attributes to the Ḥārat al-Ṣaqāliba—<sup>100</sup> the sources allow us to identify some churches dating back to the Norman period. In addition to San Pietro la Bagnara, there is the church of Santa Barbara and that of San Giacomo.

An ancient cluster of churches following the Greek rite was, however, located outside Bāb al-Sūdān, in the area lying between this latter and Porta Iudaica, near to the synagogue and the Jews' slaughterhouse.<sup>101</sup> Here there is record of a noteworthy concentration of sacred buildings which the documents of the second half of the 12th century bring to light.<sup>102</sup> The

<sup>96</sup> Rosamaria Bonacasa Carra, "Palermo paleocristiana e bizantina," in *Storia di Palermo II*, pp. 39–41.

<sup>97</sup> *Codex Diplomaticus*, cit. n. 36, 48, pp. 133–137, 1140.04.28; 76, pp. 217–223, 1148, July.

<sup>98</sup> *Kitāb Gharā'ib*, p. 444, n. 94. Identified by Johns as the baths outside the Bāb al-Shifā'.

<sup>99</sup> On Matteo d'Aiello and his foundations: Mandalà, "Una famiglia," pp. 204–211.

<sup>100</sup> *Kitāb Gharā'ib*, p. 443 ns. 85 and 90. They could perhaps be identified with San Giorgio gate and Carini gate.

<sup>101</sup> For further information on this synagogue and its annexes, see Mandalà in the present volume.

<sup>102</sup> In this area places of worship would seem to have been built on top of pre-existing palaeochristian hypogea mentioned in learned sources (Di Giovanni II, pp. 146–154). As regards the hypogea beneath San Michele Arcangelo, see Massimo Denaro and Emma

confirmed presence of palaeochristian places of worship and the density of consecrated sites would seem to indicate that some of these buildings had known uninterrupted worship during the Islamic period. This hypothesis is borne out by the presence in the area of properties belonging to Arabic-speaking Christians following the Greek rite.<sup>103</sup> In addition to the church of Santa Maria della Grotta with the monastery attached, there was the church of San Michele (before 1149), the church of the Forty Martyrs (before 1192),<sup>104</sup> the caves of Santa Parasceve and San Pancrazio, and the churches of San Leonardo de Indulcis and of San Nicola de Cufra (before 1259).<sup>105</sup>

So far as the vast inhabited zone extending to the south of the Cassaro is concerned, that is to say, the Idiesin depicted in the miniature from the *Liber ad honorem Augusti* (see Fig. 10.2), we have no information.<sup>106</sup> The only visible elements are the houses of the great court eunuchs, who were Arabo-Muslim in origin, and who had converted to Christianity, very powerful functionaries whose fortunes were very closely bound up with the sovereign's favour.<sup>107</sup> These dwellings, located in Kemonia, near to the palace gate, seemed to constitute a homogeneous cluster that would have been characterised by the high quality of the architectonic structures and probably by a certain extension. On the other hand, we cannot rule out the possibility that the eunuchs' residences served as a hinge between the palace and the zone inhabited by Muslims, which extended to the south and whose existence is attested by the sale of a house.<sup>108</sup>

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Vitale, "Il restauro del complesso di San Michele Arcangelo a Palermo: i saggi archeologici," in Gian Pietro Brogiolo, ed., *Il Congresso nazionale di Archeologia medievale (Brescia 28 settembre-1 ottobre 2000)* (Florence, 2000), pp. 366-71.

<sup>103</sup> As probably Iohannes Maimun is (Cusa, pp. 672-673, 1192).

<sup>104</sup> Cusa, pp. 672-673, 1192.

<sup>105</sup> Cusa, p. 681, 1259.

<sup>106</sup> This is an area which would subsequently lie within the Albergheria.

<sup>107</sup> On the eunuchs: Nef, *Conquérir et gouverner*, pp. 334-44. The gaito (*qā'id*) Martin (Johns, *Arabic Administration*, pp. 218-22) had a house in the Kemonia, which in 1171 belonged to the royal demesne since it was donated to the archbishop of Monreale: Carlo Alberto Garufi, *Catalogo illustrato del tabulario di S. Maria Nuova in Monreale*, Documenti per servire alla Storia di Sicilia, ser.I, t.19 (Palermo, 1902), n. 15, pp. 10-11. The gaito Peter (Johns, *Arabic Administration*, pp. 222-28) had built a new palace in Kemonia which was mentioned when in 1166 he fled Palermo (Falcando, c. 36, p. 99). The gaito Richard (Johns, *Arabic Administration*, pp. 228-234), in 1187, that is, at the end of his career as a high court functionary, purchased from the archbishop and from the cathedral chapter in Palermo an abandoned plot of land in the Kemonia (Garufi, *Documenti inediti*, pp. 214-16). The gaito John, a eunuch, rented from Sant'Andrea di Bebebne 2 plots of land near to the Bāb al-Abnā' /Palace gate in order to build a stable there (Cusa, p. 83, 1187).

<sup>108</sup> Cusa, p. 499, 1196. Houses of Muslims in a state of ruin.

To the north of the Ideisin, the Khāliṣa would seem to have been wholly absorbed into the inhabited zone, and it would be interesting to ascertain whether there had been a great deal of despoliation of the structures of the Kalbid palace, the perimeter walls and the gates.

The large quarter extending to the north of the Papireto, where the Muslims had taken refuge after 1161, is designated in the documents from the second half of the 12th century by the name of “Seralqadi,”<sup>109</sup> which probably referred to the long axial road corresponding to the present-day via Sant’Agostino/via Bandiera. The name “street of the *qāḍī*” should be correlated with the concentration of the Muslim population in the quarter, which seemed to intensify after 1161. We do not know if the toponym referred to a particular *qāḍī*, and if so, which. We cannot, however, rule it out, since a good three generations of *qāḍī*-s, all belonging to the same family, the Banu Rajā, succeeded one another between 1123 and 1161, and the toponym could have some relationship with these latter.<sup>110</sup>

Finally, the productive activities and the structures associated with the life of the city, such as the mills, installed in the Islamic period on the banks of the Papireto/Ruta and confiscated, after the conquest, and incorporated into the royal demesne, were strung along the rivers. In particular, important market structures and artisanal complexes were located in the sector to the east of the courses of the two rivers, between the porta Iudaica to the south and the gate called Bāb al-Shifā’ to the north and as far as the port area. By means of Bebilbacal gate the “noble [part] of the market” during the Islamic period, namely, the *raḥaba* and the spice market (corresponding to the present-day Lattarini)—where *funduq*-s and shops were concentrated<sup>111</sup> and where, at any rate in the first half of the 12th century, Muslim merchants continued to operate—<sup>112</sup> was connected to the Cassaro. This area was probably also connected to the merchant zone located between the Cassaro’s Bāb al-baḥr (Sea gate) and the port, an extension of the long commercial axis of the *via marmorea*. This zone was generally considered to have arisen through the gradual filling-in

<sup>109</sup> The term features for the first time, so far as I am able to judge, in a series of documents relating to the church of San Marco, preserved in the form of copies of a later date and of doubtful authenticity, published in Garufi, *Documenti inediti*, XVIII, pp. 44–45 (1144), XXXIX, pp. 91–93 (1165), LX, p. 149 (1172), LXXXVI, p. 209 (1186).

<sup>110</sup> Johns, *Arabic Administration* pp. 88–90; Nef, *Conquérir et gouverner*, pp. 322–323.

<sup>111</sup> Here at the end of the 12th century Giovanni di Melfi, *portierius* of the Castello a Mare in Palermo acquired a house with *ergasterion* (Cusa, pp. 85–86, 1191) and a *funduq* which in its turn adjoined another *funduq* (Cusa, pp. 87–88, 1196).

<sup>112</sup> A Muslim spiceseller sells his house in the Cassaro (Cusa, pp. 61–67, 1137–1138).

of the ancient port, silted up by fluvial detritus. In reality, its shape can only be explained by hypothesising one or several filling-in and drainage operations, as well as the canalisation of the two rivers which crossed it. Since the final stretches of the two canalised rivers flanked the royal arsenal, it is highly probable that the drainage operation, or perhaps the most ambitious of such operations, occurred in the context of, and so as to realise, the construction of the new arsenal. An intervention on this scale could only have been promoted by a strong central power and, consequently, it may be dated either to the late Kalbid period or to the Norman period following the transfer of the court from Messina to Palermo.<sup>113</sup> Drinking water was brought into the zone through a pipe which flowed into the fountain of the Garraffo, from the Arabic *gharrāf* (“what has a great deal of water, a canal”).<sup>114</sup> The warehouses of the curia linked to the customs house must have stood behind the arsenal. In this part of the city there was the street of the Amalfitans, who were probably already present at the end of the 10th century, together with the church of Sant’Andrea and perhaps also the original core of the Pisan and Genoese merchant colonies.<sup>115</sup> On the outermost edge of the drained area, nearly up to the port, there stood the important church of San Giacomo (attested as early as 1143), with the plain in front of it licked by the final canalised stretch of

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<sup>113</sup> The royal arsenal that features in the documents from the medieval period is probably the one in use in the Norman period to which Ibn Jubayr refers (*BAS* it., 1: 150). Al-Idrisī evokes a Palermo that had been the “headquarters of the government from an early period and from the first days of Islam; it was from there that the fleets and the armies engaged in military expeditions, and it was there that they returned, as they still do today” (Idrisī, *La première géographie*, p. 307). Then with regard to the Khālīṣa he says that the Bāb al-baḥr and the Arsenal had been there (*BAS* it., 1: 60), using the past tense. One could therefore hypothesise a shifting of the Arsenal from the Khālīṣa to the new site at the centre of the river port, delimited by the canalisation of the final reaches of the Papireto and Kemonia rivers. It is not easy to grasp exactly when such a move could have taken place, though an excavation carried out at piazza Marina, where a venerable historiographical tradition places the Arsenal of the Khālīṣa, has drawn attention to a phase of abandonment of structures associated with the establishment of the port dateable to the end of the 10th century: Francesca Spatafora and Carla Aleo Nero in *Settime Giornate Internazionali di studi sull’area elima e la Sicilia occidentale nel contesto mediterraneo (Erice 12–15 ottobre 2009)* in press.

<sup>114</sup> Caracausi, “Arabismi,” pp. 327–328.

<sup>115</sup> Relations between Pisan merchants and the Norman kingdom were regulated by the treaty of 1169: Adolf Schaube, *Storia del commercio dei popoli latini del Mediterraneo sino alla fine delle crociate* (Turin, 1915), p. 556. Regarding the Genoese presence in Palermo in the Norman period see David Abulafia, *Le due Italie: relazioni economiche tra il regno normanno di Sicilia e i comuni settentrionali* (Naples, 1991), pp. 162–63, 178, 259, 315, 346.

the Papireto.<sup>116</sup> The discovery of a *ḥammām* on the site of the sacristy may indicate that the church had been superimposed upon or built alongside a pre-existing mosque, or else that, as Abulafia hypothesises, it was a part of an early settlement of Genoese merchants.<sup>117</sup>

Also around the course of the rivers but a little further upstream, we may locate the industrial quarters for which there is evidence from this period. Near to the bed of the Kemonia stood the potteries attested both by the toponym *Fachaer* and by the discovery of a kiln (Teatro Santa Cecilia) and of discharge from kilns (via Lungarini).<sup>118</sup> These discoveries, dated to the Norman period, attest the vitality of a form of production that was Islamic in tradition, probably entrusted to Muslim artisans and supplying local and inter-regional markets. There is only scant evidence for the tanning of hides,<sup>119</sup> even though in this case too we are concerned with a form of production for an extensive market, as exports by Genoese merchants at the end of the 12th century testify.<sup>120</sup> We presume that the tannery was located on the lower reaches of the Papireto, since that is where it stood at the end of the 13th century.<sup>121</sup>

### *Private Housing*

Housing in Norman Palermo must have presented a far from uniform prospect. The old city was characterised by prestigious dwellings which were in part the legacy of the Islamic past, perhaps to be identified with the houses of the great Muslim merchants who held sway over the city

<sup>116</sup> In 1309 a vacant plot bordering the *planum* of San Giacomo *flumine mediante* was leased (Garofalo, *Tabularium*, p. 95).

<sup>117</sup> Merchant headquarters required a church, a bath, a *funduq* and an oven. In actual fact, in the 14th century, close to San Giacomo, there stood a *palacium Genoensium*. See the contract notarised on 1.01.1195 in the church of San Giacomo on behalf of members of Genoese community (Abulafia, *Le due Italie*, p. 286).

<sup>118</sup> D'Angelo "Il quartiere dell'Albergheria," "Il quartiere dell'Albergheria nei secoli XIII e XIV," *Per Salvare Palermo*, 31 (settembre–dicembre 2011), pp. 14–18; Franco D'Angelo, "Lo scarico di fornaci di ceramiche della fine dell'XI secolo-inizi del XII nel Palazzo Lungarini di Palermo," *Archeologia Medievale* XXXII (2005), 389–400; Francesca Spatafora, Laura Di Leonardo, and Emanuele Canzoneri, "Ceramica da mensa," in press.

<sup>119</sup> A contract attests the presence of two Muslim tanners, probably entrepreneurs, who in 1161 sold their house in the Cassaro (Cusa, pp. 101–106).

<sup>120</sup> Genoese exported cotton (1192), leather and hides from Palermo (Schaube, *Storia del commercio*, pp. 562–63).

<sup>121</sup> Franco D'Angelo, "Concia e conciatori nella Palermo del Duecento," *Schede medievali* 17 (1989), 111–26.



in the late Islamic period.<sup>122</sup> Amato di Montecassino refers to this housing when he speaks of the very large and tall palaces of the “Saracens,” in contrast to which the church of Santa Maria seemed an “oven.”<sup>123</sup> The same elements feature in al-Idrisī’s description: the central street of Palermo “bristles with towering palaces and lofty and noble dwellings... nor do the two remaining quarters lack tall palaces and sumptuous edifices;”<sup>124</sup> “travellers praise them to the skies, indeed they actually say there are no more wonderful buildings in the world than those of Palermo, nor are there any more distinguished settings than its places of delight. And that its palaces are the most noble, its houses the most pleasing that a man can set eyes upon.”<sup>125</sup> The same elements of the landscape reappear, and the same admiration transpires, in the words of Ibn Jubayr: “In this old Cassaro there are palaces that seem to be well-walled castles, from which manzara (balconies) soar, and dazzle the eyes with their beauty.”<sup>126</sup>

We may presume that within the regular blocks traceable back to the layout of the ancient period and positioned along the *shera*, hugging the walls, a prestigious building may have passed from one elite to another. Such a transfer would have occurred either through purchase or, as Vera von Falkenhausen and Marina Scarlata hypothesise,<sup>127</sup> thanks to the acquisition on the part of the *regia curia* of confiscated properties and the subsequent redistribution of the same to the high dignitaries and members of the aristocracy. We do not know if, in addition to the conversion of the private mosques into chapels, to which we referred above, the installation of the Christian elites had involved reconstruction and adaptation within the blocks. Nor can we determine what differences there were between the installation of the court functionaries, in their turn markedly different in their origins, influence and offices, and that of the barons of the kingdom.

The sources make only a handful of references to the house of Abū l-Qāsim Ibn Ḥammūd, but they do enable us to gain an approximate idea of the house of the chancellor Matthew of Ajello<sup>128</sup> and a circumstantial but abstract one of the urban residence of an important functionary,

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<sup>122</sup> Henri Bresc, “Le marchand, le marché et le palais dans la Sicile des X<sup>e</sup>–XII<sup>e</sup> siècles,” in Id., *Una stagione*, p. 323.

<sup>123</sup> Amato di Montecassino, XXIII p. 285.

<sup>124</sup> *BAS* it., 1: 60.

<sup>125</sup> *BAS* it., 1: 62.

<sup>126</sup> *BAS* it., 1: 161.

<sup>127</sup> See note 90.

<sup>128</sup> See note 99.

Nicholas Logothete.<sup>129</sup> They are all dwellings that can be located in the Cassaro.

Nicola's house<sup>130</sup> stood in the *ruga que dicitur de Sancto Salvatore Sanctimonialium*, a street crossing the *via marmorea* at right angles, and from the description of what bounded it we are able to reconstruct a structured complex lying between the "tribona" of the church of San Salvatore, a crumbling mosque and several houses. The various structures that made up the complex and were named in the documents of sale were: a *magna domus*, against one side of which stood the kitchen of an adjoining building, a *hugera*,<sup>131</sup> a hall, a stables, a buttery, with a flat roof, a *cammara*, and the church of San Nicola de Logotheta. These structures were in part adjoining and in part linked by spaces designed to serve as passages and by zones cultivated as gardens, to judge by the mention of a *terra senie*—that is, an area with a well and a hydraulic wheel—and of a *hirba* with a well. This latter would seem to have been a garden overlooked by the hall, the *magna domus* and the church. The complex also contained yet another well. Nicola's house was thus an aggregate of elements linked by a common space, the courtyard, and furnished with structures with monumental connotations—the hall, that is, a state room, the *magna domus* and the church—disposed around a small garden so as to constitute, perhaps, a structured whole.

Where the house donated by Matteo D'Aiello to the Benedictine Monastery founded by him is concerned, we are able to discern only some elements, which do nonetheless betray the altogether exceptional status of the very powerful Chancellor of the Kingdom. The *domus* included external elements: a vacant plot, formerly a buttery, a buttery, an oven. Here too there was a small garden behind the apse of the monastery. The *domus* had a complex system of entrances, which Matthew of Ajello, in the contract of donation, had called by the Arabic name *sikifa* while the first abess, the Latin Muriella, called it *vestibulum*. We have to do here with an entrance with a double set of doors found also in other houses in Norman Palermo, for example, in the Archbishop's Palace, and which may

<sup>129</sup> On Nicola Logotheta, a functionary serving in the administration of the Norman kingdom, a Greek from Reggio Calabria: von Falkenhausen, "I logoteti," pp. 11–16.

<sup>130</sup> De Luca, *Documenta*, n. 2, pp. 10–13; n. 7 pp. 22–24, 1200; n. 9, pp. 26–29, 15 October 1201.

<sup>131</sup> Arabic term with the meaning of *stabulum septumve camelorum, conclave domus, coenaculum, cubiculum* which in the Palermitan documents has a semantic field extending from small house to complex structure on two floors with *qā'a* and wall (Caracausi, "Arabismi," pp. 251–52).

well have been more widespread. The documents do not take us beyond the second door of the *sikifa* but inform us that the monastery was furnished with a bath, probably a *ḥammām*, like those attached to the residences of the Norman sovereigns. Matthew of Ajello's house was therefore a prestigious and lavishly appointed private dwelling.

Ibn Jubayr said that in Palermo he had seen "tall and elegant palaces" "that had belonged to him [Abū l-Qāsim Ibn Ḥammūd], to his brothers and to his kin, palaces that seemed like magnificent and elegant castles."<sup>132</sup> This passage reveals the characteristic features of the urban settlement of the Muslim elites, with extended family groups and buildings that combined the enclosed structure of the *qaṣr* with elegance. This latter attribute, highly vague though it may be, seems in fact to be a recurrent feature in the descriptions of the sources: it is perhaps a reference to a lifestyle which we may presume to have had a material reflection in the existence of *ḥammām*, green spaces even if on a limited scale and integrated into domestic space, as the *qā'a*s probably were.

Finally, a document in Arabic from 1196 allows us to see the house of a Muslim located in the south *rabad*, in the Darb al-saḥṭārī near to the Palace Gate.<sup>133</sup> The house, divided into two floors and equipped with a well, consisted of an entrance hall (*sikifa*) on the ground floor, an apartment (*bayt*), a *qā'a*, and of two rooms on the first floor. The *qā'a* is the reception area of the richest houses in Cairo and is documented from the Fatimid period onwards. The earliest example dates from the first half of the 12th century, and consisted of a central courtyard that was sunken and covered (*durqā'a*), delimited to north and south by two *īwān*-s.<sup>134</sup> It is not easy, however, to unravel the complex issue of its origins, and of its relation to the houses in Fustāṭ with open courtyards and porticos on three sides or with two facades facing the sides of the courtyard. We do not know what structure the *qā'a* had in Norman Palermo, but in the 14th century the term designated in the *hospicia* of families of "Mozarab" origin a space, called *kaa seu cortile*, consisting of a covered part and of a part that was

<sup>132</sup> BAS it., 1: 178. On Abū l-Qāsim Ibn Ḥammūd: Johns *Arabic Administration*, pp. 234–42; De Simone, *Splendori; Nef, Conquérir et gouverner* pp. 324–26.

<sup>133</sup> Cusa p. 499, 1196; on this document see Bresc, "Filologia urbana" 1981, p. 16.

<sup>134</sup> On the *qā'a* see Keppel Archibald Cameron Creswell, *The Muslim architecture of Egypt. I. Ikshīdids and Fātimids. A.D. 939–1171* (Oxford 1952) pp. 261–63, 288–90, John D. Hoag, *Architettura islamica*, (Venice 1975), pp. 150–51, Robert Hillenbrand, *Islamic architecture*, (Edinburgh, 1994) pp. 434–36, with examples subsequent to the Fatimid period. For the Sicilian examples see Bresc, "Filologia urbana," 1981, p. 16.

presumably uncovered and in which some orange trees were planted.<sup>135</sup> In any case it could be a reflection in domestic architecture of the relations between Sicily and Fatimid Egypt attested in other contexts.

Only two examples have come down to us of private, domestic buildings from the Norman period, and moreover the attribution is doubtful in either case: the palace in via Protonotaro and a part of the tower of palazzo Conte Federico.<sup>136</sup> In addition a few elements survive of the house which had originally been the property of Adelaide of Golisano and then of the Marturano—therefore members of the Latin aristocracy—and which was destroyed by allied bombing in 1943: a photograph of the courtyard with the portico<sup>137</sup> and the door jambs preserved in the Palazzo Abatellis<sup>138</sup> (see Fig. 7.3). These details are scanty, however, and relate more to the landscapes and domestic architecture of the Islamic cities, and in particular to Cairo, than to those of the Latin world. The dating of the jambs to the 12th century indicates that they were produced for a Norman commission, and demonstrates that even the private architecture of the Latin aristocracy could assume the plurilingual tone that characterised, with a wholly different ideological message, the loftiest productions associated with royal commissions. At the same time, if the dating of the Palaces in via Protonotaro to the reign of William is correct, we would have an early example of a structure on a rectangular plan facing the street and with a monumentalised facade. On the ground floor the facade had a continuous wall with an entrance that was off-centre and arrow-slit windows whereas the first floor featured large mullioned windows with two lights. We cannot help but suppose that this structure was the monumental part of a *hospicium* which took shape within the block, probably divided up into other edifices. This structure would be a recurrent feature of the 14th-century dwellings of the urban elites.

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<sup>135</sup> *Hospicium* which Costanza de Ebdemonia had received as a dowry on the occasion of her marriage *more grecorum* to Matteo de Thermis (Biblioteca Civica Ursino Recupero, Catania, Tabulario di S. Nicolò l' Arena, n. 121, 1310); *domus* of the notary Giovanni de Maramma (ASP, *Spezzoni notarili* 233N, c. 12r, 1 May, unidentified notary from the beginning of the 14th century).

<sup>136</sup> Di Stefano-Krönig, pp. 115–118, plates CLXXV–CLXXIX.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 115–16, tav. CLXXV.

<sup>138</sup> Umberto Scerrato, Gabrieli-Scerrato, fig. 198–199, p. 524 notes that, inasmuch as these door jambs are “wholly consistent with Fatimid styles” and compatible with decorative motifs dateable to around the mid-century, they can be attributed to workshops in Sicily or in Ifrīqiya.

Needless to say, alongside these structures there were smaller and less prestigious houses, as well as edifices with a commercial character, shops and *funduqs*.

### CONCLUSIONS

Early Norman Palermo was an Islamic city occupied by a Christian minority whose everyday preoccupations included that of maintaining military control. As the conquest became entrenched, and crucially once the city had assumed the rank of capital, its appearance altered. Our reconstruction of the *forma urbis* and, in particular, the distribution of the new ecclesiastical foundations, lends weight to the hypothesis that the new capital was a city where complex conflicts originating in court milieux and reflecting logics of power or of elites that were composite from the cultural and religious point of view took place;<sup>139</sup> a city in which, especially from the mid-12th century onwards, political disputes might always culminate in a polarisation between “Christians” and “Saracens,” to use the words of the author of the *Epistola ad Petrum*. By “Saracens” is meant that broad swathe of the urban population which had chosen to abide by the Muslim religion and to respect the principles of Islamic law, and which was therefore subject to a precise fiscal regime, namely, the payment of the poll-tax (*jizya*).

In this regard it is significant that the Christian religious foundations should have moved closer to the fortified areas, that is, to the Palace, Castello a Mare and the city gates. Obviously we cannot rule out the possibility that such locations were chosen with a view to settling close to the seats of power. It would seem nonetheless to be the case that the Christian elites, and particularly the Latin ones, were intent upon securing for themselves spaces that were well-defended, and tended to create homogeneous neighbourhoods. The Muslims, who had been disarmed in 1160 by Maio,<sup>140</sup> were themselves also all too well aware that the peace guaranteed by the sovereign could give way to conflict, and for the most part therefore took refuge in a quarter whose entry and exit points could be policed.

At the same time the capital of the Norman Regnum was also al-Idrīsī’s “splendid [city] that seduces,” with an urban landscape strongly marked

<sup>139</sup> Nef, *Conquérir et gouverner* p. 598ff.

<sup>140</sup> Falcando, p. 57.

by the heritage of Madīnat Ṣiqilliyya: the tall palaces of the Cassaro, the baths, the mills, the canals, the gardens, the *funduq-s* and also a number of mosques. Although the Arabo-Muslim elements were gradually driven out of the Cassaro and in part ghettoised in the Seralqadi, Islamic culture did, paradoxically enough, penetrate into the houses and customs of the elites, and was maintained within the material culture of the city. Thus while some members of the Muslim elites converted to Christianity, Christian women for their part dressed like their Muslim counterparts, and the houses of the Latin elites resembled the houses of Cairo. It was a city in which “there are modes of speech whose construction alters and whose meanings are eroded as they pass from one language to another . . .”,<sup>141</sup> but in which the houses, as they passed from one elite to another, might well undergo only limited transformations and in which one and the same structure could be called *kaa* or courtyard, or again *vestibulum* or *sikifā*, depending upon the language of the person who mentioned it.

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<sup>141</sup> From a letter by al-Ḥāfiẓ to Roger II, De Simone, “Il mezzogiorno normanno svevo,” p. 261.

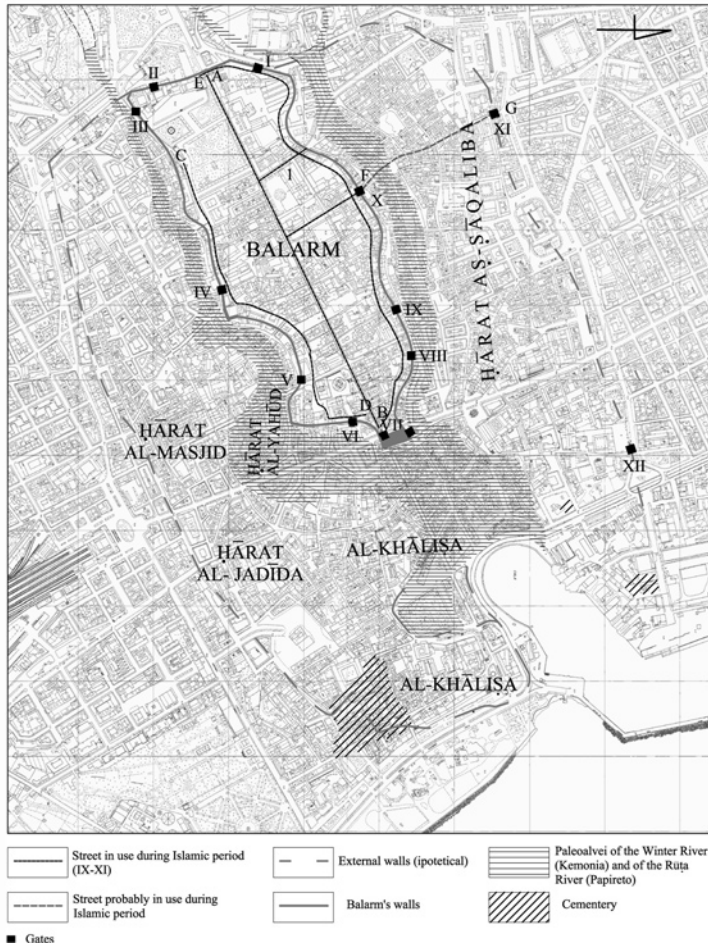


Fig. 7.1. Palermo in the late Islamic period (graphic by Dr. Maria Antonietta Parlapiano)

1 *jāmi'* mosque

### Streets

AB. *Simāṭ*, *platea marmorea*; CD. South *Shāri'*; EB. North *Shāri'*; FG. artery out of the Gate of Sant' Agata (via Beati Paoli, via Porta Carini)

### Balarm's Gates

I. *Bāb Rūta*; II. *Bāb Ibn Qurhub?*; III. *Bāb al-abnā'*; IV. *Bāb al-Sūdān*; V. *Bāb al-ḥadīd*; VI. *Bāb sūq al-Dajāj*; VII. *Bāb al-baḥr*; VIII. *Bāb ash-shifā'*; IX. *Bāb al-Bi'r*; X. *Bāb Shantaghāt*

### Hārat al-Ṣāqāliba's Gates

XI?; XII. *Bāb al-Ḥajjārīn*

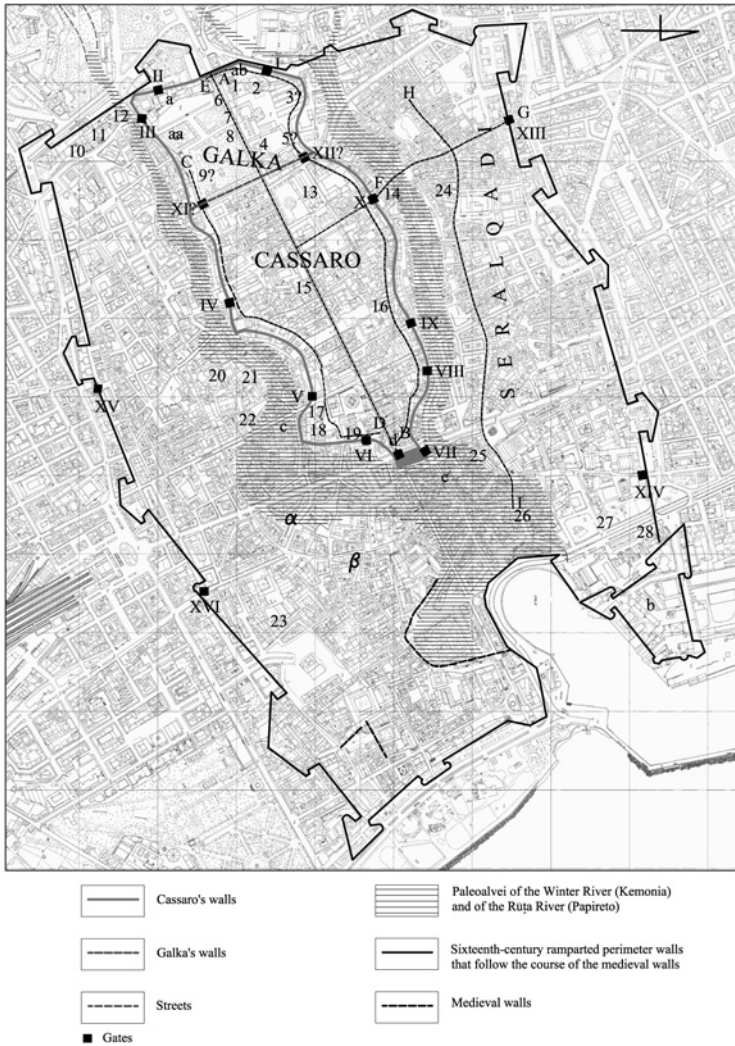


Fig. 7.2. Norman Palermo. Monuments, sites and archaeological excavations mentioned (graphic by Dr. Maria Antonietta Parlapiano)

a. Castrum Superius or Novum / Sacrum Palacium / Royal Palace; aa. Sala verde, ab. Palace of the Slaves; b. Castrum Vetus / Castrum Maris / Castello a Mare; c. Synagogue; d. Forum saracenorum / *khulā'*

**Churches, Monasteries and hospitals ( in numerical order):** 1. Santa Maddalena; 2. S. Paolo; 3. S. Giacomo la Mazara; 4. Santa Barbara; 5. S. Bartholomeo de Coperto; 6. Santa Barbara; 7. Santa Maria Della Pinta; 8. S. Giovanni; 9. S. Costantino; 10. S. Giorgio in Kemonia; 11. S. Giovanni degli Eremiti; 12. Sant' Andrea



in Kemonia; 13. Cathedral; 14. Ognissanti hospital; 15. S. Salvatore; 16. Santa Maria del Cancelliere (Matteo D'Aiello's house); 17. S. Cataldo; 18. Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio; 19. Santo Stefano; 20. S. Michele; 21. Santa Maria della Grotta; 22. S. Quaranta Martiri; 23. SS Trinità (hospital); 24. S. Marco al Seralqadi; 25. S. Nicolò lo Gurgo and church of Sant' Andrea degli Amalfitani; 26. S. Giacomo la Marina; 27. Santa Barbara; 28. S. Pietro la Bagnara

**Churches, Monasteries and hospitals (in alphabetical order):** Cathedral 13; Ognissanti (hospital) 14; Sant' Andrea in Kemonia 12; Santa Barbara 6; Santa Barbara 4; Santa Barbara 27; S. Bartholomeo de Coperto; S. Cataldo 17; S. Costantino 9; S. Giacomo la Mazara 3; 15 - S. Giacomo la Marina 26; S. Giorgio in Kemonia 10; S. Giovanni degli Eremiti 11; S. Giovanni alla Galka 8; Santa Maddalena 1; Santa Maria del Cancelliere (Matteo D'Aiello's House) 16; Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio 18; Santa Maria della Grotta 21; Santa Maria della Pinta 7; S. Michele 20; 14-S. Nicolò lo Gurgo and church of Sant' Andrea degli Amalfitani 25; S. Paolo 2; 16-S. Pietro la Bagnara 28; S. Quaranta Martiri 23; S. Salvatore 15; Santo Stefano 19; SS Trinità 24

*archaeological excavations:* α Pottery kiln (teatro St Cecilia); β Kiln dump (Palazzo Lungarini)

#### Streets

AB. *Simāt* / *platea* or *ruga* or *via marmorea*; CD. *Shāri'* south / *sera Buali*; EB. *Shāri'* north / *sera Cancellarii*; FG. artery out of the Gate of Sant'Agata (via Beati Paoli, via Porta Carini); HI. *sera al qādī*

#### Cassaro's and Galka's gates

I. *Bāb Rūta* / *Porta Rote*; II. *Bāb Ibn Qurhub?*; III. *Bāb al-abnā'* / *Porta Palacii*; IV. *Bāb al-Sūdān* / *Porta Busuemi*; V. *Bāb al-ḥadīd* / *Porta Iudaica*; VI. *Bāb sūq al-Dajāj* / *Porta Bebilbakal*; VII. *Bāb al-baḥr* / *Porta Patitellorum*; VIII. *Bāb as-shifā'* / *Porta Oscura*; IX. *Bāb al-Bi'r* / *Porta Sclavorum*; X. *Bāb Shantaghāt* / *Porta S. Agate*; XI. *Porta Galke* / *Porta Trabucketti*; XII. *Porta Cooperti*

#### The gates to the external walls

XIII. Porta Carini; XIV. Porta S. Giorgio; XV. Porta Sant'Agata; XVI. Porta di Termini

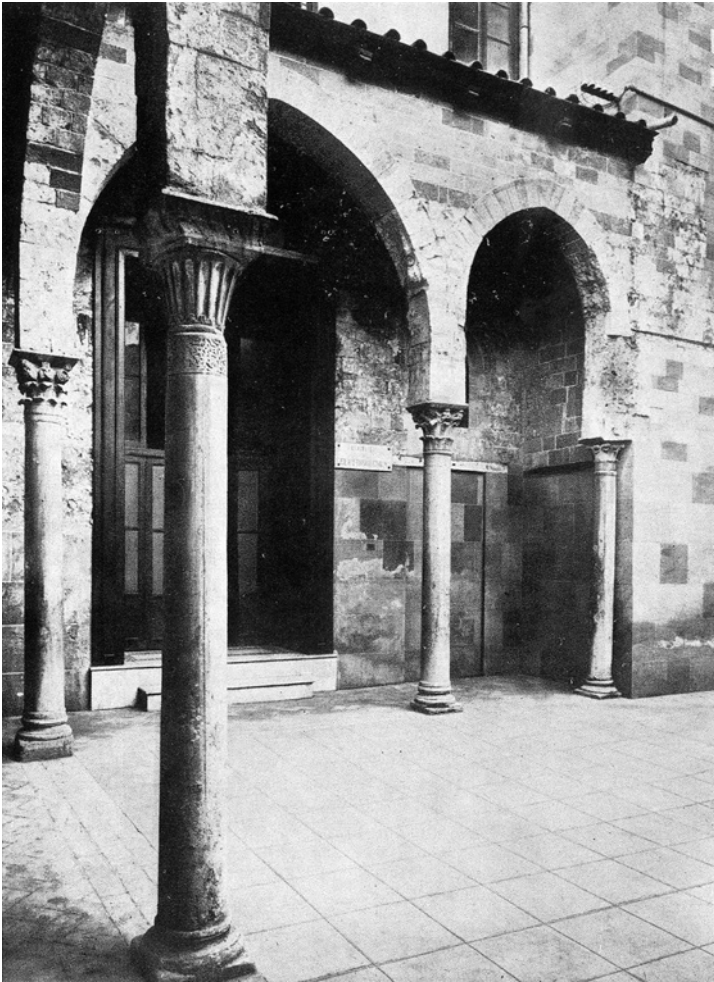


Fig. 7.3. Casa Martorana



Fig. 7.4. Casa Martorana's door jamb

PALERMO AND THE MEDITERRANEAN AT THE END OF THE  
MIDDLE AGES



PALERMO IN THE 14TH–15TH CENTURY:  
URBAN ECONOMY AND TRADE

Henri Bresc

It was the paradoxical fate of Palermo in the last centuries of the middle ages to be a political capital abandoned by the monarchy but bolstered economically by the stability, and latterly by the revival, of income from land. The city's economic activity was sustained by the expenses incurred by the landed aristocracy and the clergy, and it developed a rural centre whose impact could be felt even at the outermost limits of the Archbishopric of Monreale. The centre of the Val de Mazara had in fact been wholly cleared of its inhabitants by the civil war that raged between 1190 and 1240, and by the deportation of the Muslims to Lucera; the network of its townships was totally abandoned (Caltatrasi, Iato, etc.) and Palermo's hinterland was then empty across a radius of thirty to fifty kilometres. Yet in time an extremely active commercial centre would spring up there, consisting in the main of foreign merchants, who were able to settle and in their turn become part of the landed nobility. Its population may have varied in response to the demographic conjuncture, but it was coupled with a western Sicily that was then highly productive and able to export raw materials, and its situation may be likened to that of medieval or 19th century Alexandria, *ad Aegyptum*. These three motifs—a rentier city, the city in the country, and a constantly developing commercial centre—together serve to delineate two economies, a “lower” economy, which was embedded in relations of dependence and authority and closely supervised by the municipal authorities, and an “upper” economy, maintaining long-distance relationships, being potentially independent of the territory on to which it was grafted, and only to a small extent constrained by the decisions of a state that was impoverished, the prisoner of its own financial needs and of the support of the international merchant milieu. Between these two levels some traffic did, however, develop, in response to industrial initiatives which exploited and stimulated the municipal territory.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> References are in Henri Bresc, *Un Monde méditerranéen: économie et société en Sicile (1300–1460)*, Bibliothèque des Ecoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome, 262 (Paris-Rome-

## THE RENTIER CITY

*A Capital in Decay but Economically a Capital Nonetheless*

In demographic terms, the Palermo of the final centuries of the Middle Ages had a modest profile. Indeed, its population suffered a steep decline from the some 50,000 inhabitants it doubtless had around 1270, after a probable peak towards 1340, to 4,082 hearths and 20,000 to 25,000 inhabitants in 1376, to 5517 hearths and 25,012 inhabitants in 1479, and to an even lower figure in 1495–1496, after the expulsion of the Jews, when 4779 houses and 22,177 inhabitants are recorded. Around 1300, Palermo would still count as one of the great cities of southern Europe, though it could not match the 100,000 Florentines, the 75,000 Milanese, the 60,000 Bolognese or Genovese, but after 1350 it fell behind Naples.

The relative weakness of Palermo may no doubt be accounted for by the periodic recurrence of the plague, but above all by its loss of the Court when Frederick II left for Germany. The rapid development of the capital, which by 1070 had attained to the dimensions it would retain until the 18th century, namely, 200 hectares, owed everything to the residence of the Kalbids, and latterly the Hauteville. Subsequently, the presence of the royal Hotel was ephemeral, coinciding with major political events, coronations and parliaments. After 1412, the residence of the Viceroy and his court was fixed at the Chiaramonte Palace, the Steri. Some expenses were involved, certainly, but not so as to rival those that had made the fortunes of Catania from the 14th to the beginning of the 15th century, and afterwards of Naples. At Palermo, entire quarters were abandoned, such as the Galka, the former royal town around the Palace, a part of the Kalsa, broad swathes of the Cassaro, dotted with ruined houses turned into gardens, while garden corridors were inserted between the Cassaro and the Seralcadi, between the Cassaro and the Albergheria and along the city walls.

State revenues, which were anyway limited—90,000 florins according to the budget forecast for 1400–1402—were in the main spent elsewhere, in eastern Sicily, but Palermo included a high number of aristocratic residences and centres for the collection of rents from land. Thus, in 1336, the feudal rent flowing into Palermo was as much as 3825 onze (around 19,000 florins), according to the *Quaternus antiquus feodorum*. The twenty-three

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Palermo, 1986), completed, so far as the years 1460–1500 are concerned, by Stephan R. Epstein, *An island for itself: Economic development and social change in late medieval Sicily* (Cambridge, 1992).

fiefholders residing there owned thirty-five fiefs and received 18.4% of Sicilian feudal rent. In 1343 there were 2450 onze according to the “adoamento” of the fiefs, for thirty fief-holders, 17% of the total for Sicily. Funds really seemed to be draining from a large area in 1408, of thirty-two fiefs belonging to the Palermitan nobility, only two were on the territory of Palermo. Rent from land also brought all the Palermitan churches an income of 2110 onze in 1308–10, plus the 1,241 onze of the archbishop of Monreale, almost 30% of the 11,500 onze of income accruing to the Sicilian churches as a whole. These churches’ *latifundia*, though no doubt smaller than those of the feudal landowners, in fact numbered as many as 84, 27 of them belonging to the Cathedral, to which one should add the thirty or so fiefs of the archdiocese of Monreale. Probably over 7000 onze in rent, then, at the beginning of the 14th century, a level of income which was maintained thanks to the decision to opt for cereals, grown for export, and which rose with the upturn of the following century: in 1455, according to the roll of the apostolic tithe, the Palermitan churches received an income of 2400 onze, not counting Monreale’s 1792 onze. A high proportion of these landed properties were administered and exploited by Palermitans: the members of the patriciate rented en bloc the *latifundia* close to the city, while notaries and canons managed the ecclesiastical properties, and it was the agricultural entrepreneurs, the *borgesi*, and the market gardeners who leased fields for short agricultural cycles.

These rents were first and foremost sustained by exports. The residence of the masters of the soil in the city fixed in Palermo a rudimentary “stock exchange” for wheat and cheese at which the notaries recorded numerous contracts of sale. Even in the absence of the Court, Palermo remained the headquarters of merchant buyers, and a convenient place to meet up with the owners of the fiefs and their administrators: although there was obviously variation from one decade to the next, between 15 and 50% of the commercialized grain production passed through the hands of the masters of the soil, the upper clergy and the feudal nobility. This does not mean that all the grain was brought to Palermo: around a quarter of the corn sold in Palermo was delivered to the fiefs. The share of the fief-holders in these sales, though small at the beginning of the 14th century, swelled around 1380 and remained large until 1450, with over half the quantities that reached the market being ratified by a Palermitan notary. This was a period when the nobility and the royal Court, being perturbed by falls in rent, attempted with some success to hoard grain and to monopolize the trade in it. Palermo was also the centre, or the relay point, for the portolan master’s offices which issued the export permits: in 1299, in 1341, in 1344,



in 1345, it was Tuscan merchants, in particular the Acciajuoli, Bardi and Peruzzi, in the name of the portolan master, the admiral or the queen, who sold export permits at Palermo. In 1341, some merchants also went into partnership with the portolan master himself in order to export wheat.

### *The Consuming City*

#### *The Provisioning of the City*

Income from the land first of all guaranteed the provisioning of Palermo: a rent in kind, be it smaller livestock, butter, cheese, wheat or barley, is specified in all the leases. It was, moreover, a brake on trade; around 1325 there were twenty or so fiefholders' hotels,<sup>2</sup> and at least twenty-five a century later.<sup>3</sup> One should add to this tally the monasteries and the houses of those responsible for administering the feudal estates. The quantities consumed by the producers themselves are difficult to estimate, but we can glimpse how things stood from the inventories: the hospital of San Bartolomeo, in 1430, thus stored as much as 280 kilos of oil, so crucial for lighting, frying food and grooming, forty-four hectolitres of wheat and twenty and a half hectolitres of barley, a little flour and the wherewithal to preserve 111 hectolitres of wine; in 1455, Giovanni Carastono's storehouse contained two hundred rounds of cheese and ten jars of butter. However, the main part of the reserves of the aristocratic houses was not kept in the hotels but in the grain ditches of the *massarie*.

The notarized deeds do not testify to the existence of a spontaneous and active grain trade: the zone supplying crops was narrow, its borders passing through Ciminna, Caccamo, Castronovo, Bivona, Corleone, Giuliana, Alcamo and, in exceptional circumstances, Polizzi. The mountains around Palermo were an obstacle; the grain had to be transported on the backs of mules, which was costly. Municipal policy heeded the plight of the poor, who "buy their bread daily" and suffered therefore from high prices; shortages threatened in 1311, in 1335, in 1341, in 1349, in 1351, and again in 1413, in 1417, in 1430, from 1449 to 1451, and again in 1462 and in 1494. The municipality sought out regular sources of cheap grain, and in 1316 obtained a monopoly, in case of famine or plague, over the *caricatori*

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<sup>2</sup> The main ones were: Calvellis, Chiamonte, Ebdemonia, Filangeri, Incisa, Maida, Milia, Pipitone, Sclafani, Tagliavia.

<sup>3</sup> Abbatellis, Afflito, de Bartholomeo, Calvellis, Crispo, La Grua, Omodei, Paruta, Pilaya, Spatafora, Tagliavia.

of Termini and Castellammare del Golfo. In years of high prices, the city mobilized the muleteers and its own citizens: in 1449 they set out in search of wheat in the *massarie* of Bicchinello, to the north of Corleone, beneath the Busambra, and in those of Balletto, near to the ancient Iato. The city then had to rely upon the good graces of the masters of the soil, its fellow citizens, and it praised their euergetism.

Palermitan butchers needed a plentiful supply of high quality meat, sheep from the Madonies which passed the summer in the fiefdoms of the Palermitan nobility, and bovines from the stockbreeders of Polizzi, Caccamo, Corleone and Prizzi fattened up in the forest of Bagheria prior to their coming on to the urban market. There was also an active market in horses and in mules likewise, which came from Alcamo, the Madonies, Castelvetro, Piazza and even from more far-flung parts of Sicily.

Urban provisioning was the municipal administration's great obsession, reflected in a constant stream of measures adopted and decisions taken to ensure the hygiene of market-places, the abundance, quality and freshness of grain, of flour and meat, and of fish during Lent. From 1330 onwards, *maxima*, or *mete*, proliferated and, gradually, came to be applied to every kind of foodstuff, from milk, butter, lard, vegetables, with countless refinements being introduced, regarding the listing of different kinds of offal, for example. The most routine measures concerned loaves of bread, whose prices and weights would be fixed in relation to the economic conjuncture. The purchase of grain and its enforced distribution to the bakers were a source of recurrent tension. In order to keep the prices reasonably low, the municipality imposed a strict ban, from 1330 onwards, on resellers going outside the city gates to buy grain, vegetables or firewood. The consumer's direct access to imported commodities was also guaranteed: the Customs of Palermo imposed a *triduum*, that is, three days' respite, before sale to small tradesmen was permitted. The "lower" economy was thus constrained and protected.

### *Importing, Luxuries and Basic Necessities*

There is evidence of imports, both in the notarized contracts, which give very precise descriptions, and in the inventories. The author, after Carmelo Trasselli, has used three hundred of the latter, which often identify the geographical origin of the objects, in particular those sold in haberdashers' shops. What we first of all encounter is luxury goods mentioned occasionally in the inventories of nobles, patricians, of agricultural entrepreneurs also, and of artisans: gold objects from Montpellier (cups, spoons), from

the 14th century onwards, then from Barcelona, and then finally from Naples in the second half of the 15th century, when the Aragonese court drew the fabrication of such objects, Pisan works of art in the 14th century, objects “worked in Damask,” silverware “in the Pera style,” carpets from Barbary and from Tartary in the 14th century, from Turkey and from Romania in the 15th century, tapestries from France and Flanders, with foliage or with figures. Purchases of jewels, as those of cloths, involved huge sums, and testified to the formidably receptive and lavish tastes of the aristocracy: in 1455 Gilibert La Grua-Talamanca bought a diamond, flanked by four rubies and three turquoises and mounted in a single jewel, for thirty onze, or 150 florins.

Importing also encompassed most manufactured products, all woolen cloths “of colour” that were luxury goods (Malines, Brussels, Lille, Florence), or of average quality (Wervicq, Beauvais, Montivilliers, Catalan, English and Languedocian cloths), a wide variety of linens, Burgundian and Dutch, and cottons, of Neapolitan, Pisan and Genoese towels. The technical deterioration in the work of Sicilian artisans, and the lack of mines in Sicily, account for the importation of iron rods, from Pisa and Biscay, and the flood of Pisan iron tools, ploughshares, grates, chandeliers, saucepans and, from Genoa, locks, curry-combs, iron arms and armours from Milan, Flemish knives, German and Catalan swords, Catalan shields, and Catalan, Genoese and German padlocks. As for coppers, copperware, “Flemish” basins and candelabras, they were brought in on the Venetian galleys. Ceramic objects, even if culinary, were transported in huge jars: Pisan and Catalan pitchers, bowls and plates with metallic mirrors from Murcia and Malaga, and finally majolica from the Marches and Romagna at the end of the 15th century, enamelled tiles from Rome, Pisa and Genoa for the floors of the new Palermitan palaces.

Artisanal products are also described and identified, and first and foremost items of furniture, Pisan painted chests, Neapolitan and Messinan caskets, Catalan and Neapolitan chairs, and an abundance of Maghrebian artisanal objects, clothes, burnous, jubbas, carpets, hides to put on the ground, towels, quilts, padlocks, baskets, fans, jars, mats and cages. These rare, but not costly, goods, whose appeal lay in their curiosity value, reflect the sheer intensity of Palermo’s maritime relationships.

Competition from importers may explain the decline in local artisanal production; in 1457 there was but the one glazier on the whole island, and it was therefore only in 1476 that the first glazed window was attested in Palermo, in the archbishop’s palace, whereas such things might be found in Bologna as early as 1335 and in Florence at the end of the 14th century. The

immigration into Sicily of technicians, goldsmiths, ceramists, stonemasons, and sculptors compensated to some degree for the limited transmission of techniques and served to meet the needs of the aristocracy. Specialists circulated more rapidly in the 15th century, when the aristocracy took up residence once and for all in the city. Restricted in the 14th century to highly specialized trades linked to the geographical origin of the migrants, who included Milanese armourers and Amalfitan coopers, there was expansion and a broader area of recruitment subsequently: Catalan goldsmiths and embroiderers, silversmiths from the Dauphiné, makers of French and German daggers, makers of caskets from Naples, Catalan tailors, and finally Lombards also, masons and stonecutters.

*The Outlets for Rent: The Aristocracy and the Market*

The aristocracy, the patriciate and the upper clergy could call upon substantial monetary reserves which lay idle: 3300 florins in the archbishop's possession in 1377, 450 florins in that of a noble in 1383, 641 onze in gold coin in that of Giovanni Carastono in 1454, and no less than 1188 onze in coin in that of the juriconsult Rinaldo Sottile in 1487. The members of the feudal aristocracy would from time to time play a part in financing trading ventures, advancing sums to merchants based in Palermo. For example, in 1347 Baron Pietro de Siragusa lent 100 florins to the Genoese Raffaele Squarciafico. They also helped small entrepreneurs with more trifling sums. Thus, in 1429, Dame Costanza Chiaramonte advanced the butcher Conrado di Lu Mirabitu the sum of eleven onze (55 florins), and loaned two onze to master Paolo Ceraulo. Clergymen, whether prelates or beneficed, also financed both major commerce and the smallscale activity of artisan-traders: in 1349 Giorgio de Zaffaronibus, in the name of archbishop Teobaldo, advanced 200 florins to a Pisan merchant, while in 1373 sister Ismiralda de Senato came to an arrangement with a moneychanger over an order of five onze; she would receive half the profits. In 1408, the Catalan archbishop Joan de Proixida, advanced the sum of 2000 florins to a group of Genoese merchants. But such ventures were invariably on a limited scale.

The only enduring partnerships combining the merchant and feudal capital accumulated in Palermo mobilized it for banking activities centred on the Court of Alfonso V, and had nothing to do with the Palermitan economy. Thus, in 1453 the great seneschal Gaston Moncada, for 5000 florins, sire Galceran Vilanova for 3000 florins, and the Catalan merchant Francesc Alegre for 8000 florins, set up a banking concern which would

engage in money-changing activities in Naples. There was something genuinely “offshore” about such an undertaking.

The Baronial nobility would come to Palermo in order to buy directly. Thus, in 1339, Scaloro degli Uberti, Baron of Assoro, replenished his stocks of chainmail there; in 1453 Ugo Santa Pau, Baron of Butera, spent 380 onze in one go on fabrics and haberdashery; between 1453 and 1455, Gilbert la Grua, Baron of Carini, bought fabrics and haberdashery to the value of no less than 796 onze, and spent 100 onze on precious stones and luxury garments. These colossal purchases no doubt served to dress family and clients, and to decorate castles, but a proportion of the cloths was destined for the local shop that a draper had launched with the protection and backing of the baron.

#### THE “LOWER” ECONOMY: THE CITY IN THE COUNTRY AND ARTISANAL PRODUCTION

##### *The City in the Country*

Medieval Palermo was an agricultural powerhouse: from the environs of the city, with its gardens, vineyards and sugar cane fields, to the huge ring of *massarie* and *mandrie*, the agricultural entrepreneurs had carved out for themselves an ample agricultural territory, and one that they defended stubbornly against the ambitions of their rivals in the “estates” of the Mountain zone, and against the claims of the owners of fiefs. The countryside was also present within the city itself, for the itinerant selling of goats’ milk brought flocks inside the walls, and the municipality had to clear the streets of heaps of manure, or confine them to areas around the city gates.

##### *The Ring of Intensive Agriculture*

A first ring, consisting of gardens and vineyards, occupied the space nearby, the Conca d’Oro, the Costiera of Monreale, up to the forest of Bagheria, which had been cleared bit by bit, and that of Trabia. Two garden corridors occupied the irrigated *contrade*: from the Gabriele to the Cuba, the Zisa, and up to Sant’Oliva, and from the Sabugia to the Ponte dell’Ammiraglio, penetrating *intra muros* at Ballarò, to the Guçzetta and as far as the Kalsa. Horticultural activity was intense, painstaking, serving the urban market exclusively; we know of only one case in which vegetables were exported, with two cargoes of onions being dispatched to Cagliari.

in 1329. Some entrepreneurs, the *gabelotti*, men of some authority and respected arbiters in their own quarters, often Continent friars, rented land, purchased water for irrigation, and recruited labourers whose wages varied with the season and the length of the working day.

Vineyards had originally been densely planted in the areas around the city gates, but they had given way first to wheat and then to sugar. At the end of the 13th, and the beginning of the 14th century, after the "Saracen wars," the demographic revival led to the cultivating of the royal gardens, Cuba, Zisa and Favara, and of the non-irrigated quarters, up to the hills of Monreale. The decision to opt for vineyards was closely linked to the economic policy of the aristocracy and the clergy: they ran taverns in the city itself and along the roads, both for prestige and for profit. In the 15th century, the vines, driven from the plain by sugar cane, moved towards the Colli and the Piana di Gallo, and indeed beyond, into the fiefs of Capaci and Misilmeri, and into the forest of Bagheria, where several Jews in particular, around the time of the expulsion, in 1492–93, were the owners of vineyards, but not in sufficient quantities. Around 1450, the account book of the "credenziere" of Porta Carini, through which the entire grape harvest passed, recorded for the period between September and October 340 *centenari* of grapes, or 4150 tons, from which 6138 casks of wine, or 25,292 hectolitres, might be made, barely one hundred litres per inhabitant and per year. Imports were therefore needed, and indeed encouraged by the municipality, since they provided a ready source of taxes: quality wines, such as the "Greek" ones from Naples and malmsey, and ordinary quality wines, the Calabrian reds, which returned in 1366 after the armistice. This approach clashed with the universal policy of protecting local producers, but it was justified by necessity.

Trees were rare, being planted in the enclosed gardens which surrounded the suburban villas, and there were few citrus orchards, and olive or almond groves. Oil was imported from Gaeta and from Tunisia; only two large olive groves caught the eye, each with over a thousand trees, one belonging to the Chiaramonte in the 14th century at Chamirichi (Passo de Rigano), and the other belonging to the Carastono at La Sabugia in the 15th century. The opportunity to profit by intensification was seized only belatedly by the Catalan archbishop of Monreale, Ausias de Spuig, who obtained from the monastery of Santa Caterina the transfer of the fief of Montelepre in return for a rent of fifteen onze, and planted an olive grove there.

The municipality lavished a great deal of care upon this agricultural zone and its activities, frequently taking steps, in 1407, in 1414 and in 1437,

to protect the gardens and the vineyards, to bar the passage of huntsmen and riders, and to crack down on the damage done by stray cattle. It also established maximum wage levels and laid down the rule that agricultural labourers should work “from sunrise to sunset”, *di suli in suli*. The authorities thus faced a wage inflation which had also led entrepreneurs to recruit children and adolescents and to set slaves to work. As in the artisanal sphere, gardens were a world of bridled labour and of informal authority.

*Massarie and Mandre: The Cerealiculture and Stock-Breeding Zone*

In medieval Sicily, a municipality's agricultural territory was elastic, its extent depending upon the balance of forces between the *borgesi*, entrepreneurs in cereals and stockbreeders, and the fief-holding lords, the barons of small inhabited “estates,” or of abandoned villages on demesnes where the *borgesi* claimed the right to sow. *Massarie* and *mandre* belonging to Palermitans extended broadly from the Montagna del Cane to Ciminna and to the plain of Vicari, but also across the northern part of the demesnes of Monreale and across the fiefs of Carini, Montelepre and Partinico, up to Macellaro (Camporeale), leaving the fiefs of the Upper Belice to the *massari* of Corleone. The leases were rotated every two to three years. The *borgesi* had at their disposal a plough, five oxen, over thirteen hectares. Some very large enterprises combined the technical capacities of these *massari* and the means, the land and the traction oxen of the masters of the soil, members of the feudal aristocracy and big monasteries, up to eight ploughs and over fifty traction oxen. At Macaluso, near to Vicari, in 1479–80, a Palermitan *massaria* financed by a Palermitan patrician was able to mobilize twelve permanent labourers for fifty-nine oxen, plus ten workmen hired for one or two months and numerous teams of harvesters, 339 over twelve days.<sup>4</sup> Sowing was done *a copertura*, with one *salma* of grain, that is 2.75 hectoliters, per *salmata* of land, that is, 1.75 hectares. The high yields from this sowing, between five, seven and eighteen or twenty grains per grain sown for wheat and between five and twenty-four for barley, on average eleven quintals per hectare, bear comparison with the elevated levels obtained on the alluvial soils of northern France through “intensive agriculture.”

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<sup>4</sup> Henri Bresc, “La *massaria* sicilienne au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle: le compte de Benedetto Bonaguida,” *Bolletino dell'Istituto italiano per il medioevo e Archivio Muratoriano* 109/2 (2007), 35–64.

Palermo's pastoral zone likewise extended from the mountains of Carini and of Capaci to Mount Cane (Baucina, Calamigna), to Mezzoiuso, Godrano and la Busambra, penetrating the territory of Monreale at Beluino (today Tagliavia). The flocks were huge: in the 14th century, on average 170 cows, plus over 1200 sheep and over 400 pigs; in the following century, the averages remained very high, 180 cows, over 600 sheep and over 200 pigs. The sheer scale of the aristocracy's ventures was remarkable in this context: in 1306 Bartolomeo Tagliavia owned 500 bovines, 9200 ovines and 1000 pigs. Such ventures were administered *a parzamia*: the owners of the soil and the administrators of fiefs, patricians and notaries, entrusted it to partners, *mandra* entrepreneurs who recruited oxherds and shepherds and merged their own herds with the ones they were administering. Yields were also high: 400 litres of milk, 40 kilograms of cheese, per cow, four to six kilograms of cheese per sheep, a calf and a lamb every two years.

The members of the Palermitan feudal nobility and of the urban chivalry, families such as Calatagirono, Cisario, Filangeri, La Chabica, Palmerio Pipitone, Tagliavia, Thetis, Trayna, and among the merchants, such men as Giovanni Aldibrandino and Manfredi Boccadorzo, thus financed and sustained cereal production in the 14th century, for provisioning the city, and to an extent that is difficult to determine, for export. In the 15th century, the documents, which by this date survive in greater numbers, reflect generalized investment in the *massaria* on the part of the urban nobility, with families such as Manuele, Omodei, Scorialupo and Vitali involved, as were merchants and in particular some Jews, in the second half of the century. Conversely, the Palermitans' involvement in stockbreeding declined, in the face of competition from entrepreneurs of the villages of the Madonies, who rented the fiefs and came in on foot to Palermo in order to sell cheese, butter and meat. Nothing here indicates a traditional economy: the Jews of Palermo also participated in the *mandra*, men such as Sufen Taguil, Sabet Cusintinus and Merdoc Marmaymuni from 1393 and 1397, and David Bramuni and Gimilon Nachay, before they threw themselves into cerealiculture. Wages were high and freely negotiated in the case of labourers and oxherds, whose painstaking work demanded real competence, but women were also recruited to look after the *massaria*, and children to bring out food and drink to the fields, and some men by the month for weeding and odd jobs. The municipality only intervened to restrain the pay of the harvesters.

From 1407 the Council had met in an assembly together with the leading citizens and merchants, in order to fix an harvest price, the "meta" for wheat and another for barley, the price "between *massari* and merchants,"



This price included remuneration for the sums advanced to the entrepreneurs. It was essentially a question here of small advances granted by intermediaries who would resell the grain to the bakers and to the consumer, and of cereals destined for the provisioning of the city. Large-scale commerce, though it did not disregard the "meta", had greater liberty to fix its prices.

### *Unachieved Expansion*

The capital, so dominated as it by the huge fiefs of Monreale, lacked a large municipal territory: other massive parts of the mountain belonged to the monasteries of Santa Maria di Altofonte and San Martino delle Scale. The citizens of Palermo had no forest in which to gather firewood, cut green wood for beams, rafters, handles of agricultural and artisanal tools, charcoal for cooking, myrtle for tanning, and "wild herbs" for those difficult months when there was hunger and a gap to be bridged. Communal rights (*usi civici*) had been won, not without difficulty, over the royal forests, Godrano, Parco, Bagheria, and over the great fiefs of Partinico and Carini and Monte Cane. The city consolidated and extended such rights, in 1306 and again in 1320.

Control over the territory of Monreale and of Altofonte would seem to have been crucial: in 1349 the city demanded that its criminal jurisdiction over Monreale be restored, and then, in 1419, that the revenues from Monreale and the abbey of Altofonte be managed by a citizen of Palermo as head of the vestry board and, in 1431, that Altofonte be annexed to the "Grand and new Hospital" built by the city. In 1312 and in 1451, the Senate prohibited the firing, in summer, of the stubble, under pain of death, across a radius of thirty miles, or fifty kilometres. The city was seeking here to win complete authority, in the form of a district, consolidated in law, corresponding to the zone of expansion of its entrepreneurs in cerealiculture and stockbreeding. However, by contrast with Messina and Girgenti, this zone was open to negotiation, and a matter of informal authority and of rival ambitions.

### *A Rural Market*

A *noria* of muleteers guaranteed the transportation into Palermo of grain, cheese, rock salt, firewood, charcoal and tanning products. Each of them led from two to seven mules, depending upon their loads, and covered some sixty kilometres a day. Muleteers circulated very widely, and their geographical origin was quite distinct from that of the products

they supplied: the muleteers from Cammarata, a salt-mine village, shared the carriage of salt with others, from Nicosia, Noto, Sciacca and Troina. Still others, who carried forest produce, were from Alcamo, Castelvetrano, Cefalù and Polizzi. Modest and active entrepreneurs, the muleteers were the connective tissue of the “lower” economy; they represented the small Palermitan traders in the villages, set up woodcutters’ and charcoal burners’ societies, and took part in the collecting of myrtle, a key ingredient for those involved in the tanning industry, from the plain of Carini and Partinico. If wood for building, planks and beams, came from the Dalmatian coast, and later from Calabria, firewood came in the form of bundles or as long logs, three per mule. Transport costs were heavy, one tari to one tari and a half per cantare weighing eighty kilograms. The stumbling block was therefore first and foremost a lack of energy; only the motive energy of water was abundant.

A market had therefore been created at the South gate to the city, known as the Feravecchia or *Platea asinorum*, overlooking a quarter of taverns and inns, the *fondaci*, a spontaneous stock exchange for the “lower” economy. The same activity, with inns and taverns, had crystallized around the *piano della Marina*, near to San Giacomo, where goods brought by ship, such as sea salt and firewood for the sugar refineries, were stockpiled. The innkeepers lent out small sums, put hauliers and clients in contact with one another, and sold mules.

### *Artisanal Production and Services*

#### *The Decline of the Artisans*

Being involved in the 13th century in trade and rural investment, the artisans at that period played a crucial political role: alongside the urban nobility they constituted the *Popolo*, the motor of insurrection, and furnished Peter the Great’s army with a significant number of knights: twelve bore the names of trades as their patronyms. In the 14th century, the artisans still enjoyed great prestige; they made much of skills that were honourable and played a modest but effective role in rural enterprise—financing *massarie* or market gardens, and renting fields in the suburbs for the sowing of grain—and in petty commerce. Their activities were principally linked to their trades, the imported leather business if they were tanners and saddlers, the renting out of ships if they were marine carpenters, but they might also trade in wine, cheese and tuna, or lend money to their fellow artisans. Master Pagano Ardingi, a *coppulario*, or maker of skullcaps, thus traded in 1326–27 in iron and in silk; in 1360 master

Giovanni de Alfano, scabbard-maker, advanced a butcher three onze. The families of tanners, silk manufacturers, makers of candles, cobblers even, were related to notaries, judges and entrepreneurs, but the political role of the *Popolo* ended with the Seigneurie of the Chiaramonte.

In the 15th century, the artisans no longer enjoyed such prestige or wealth. Their technical decline was remarkable: whereas we know of at least twenty-five silk manufacturers before 1358, financed by merchants from Messina, Pisa and Lucca, the art of silk disappeared from the documents after this date. This deskilling was reflected in the disappearance of several trades, including that of hatters, glovemakers, and the makers of skullcaps, blankets and moneybags. On the other hand, foreign artisans immigrated into Palermo in ever greater numbers, and this development would seem to have compensated for the decline in local activities, with trimmers of cloth from Arras, German hatters and cobblers, and Catalan tailors. The “candles” invited to take part in the illumination of the city, the *Luminaria*, of 15 August, were scattered across 45 different trades, and thus too numerous; the artisanal milieu did not have the same influence as that possessed by the denser “Arts” of northern Italy. The consulates were only set up later, after 1414, during a second phase of popular claims. It culminated in the revolt of 1450, the highpoint in a wave of rebellions which shook the whole of Sicily, Catania, then Messina; in 1451, the parliament managed to get the consulates abolished.

The impoverishment of the artisans is underlined by their diminishing involvement in commercial enterprise, now limited to taverns. Participation in seasonal work had enabled them since the 14th century to take on associated remunerative activities: treading grapes at the grape harvest, being hired as cutters in the madrague *tuna-fishery* lodges, or serving on the galleys. With the development of the sugar business, artisans became cutters of cane, or of young slips. These short-term contracts enabled them to accumulate savings. Dependent upon their sponsors, artisans were also locked into a network based on their quarter which left little scope for individual success.

### *The Archaisms of the Palermitan Sea*

Close to the port, in the Cala itself and at Porta dei Greci, small naval yards built ships, in particular the *xeri* used with the madrague *tuna-fisheries*.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Henri Bresce, “Una flotta mercantile periferica: la marina siciliana medievale,” *Studi di Storia navale. Centro per la Storia della Tecnica in Italia* IV/7 (1975), 7–24.

In the town itself, the arsenal (the Tarzanà), located behind a wall which was knocked down to let the galleys in need of repair and the newly built vessels pass through, still had the capacity in the 15th century to fit out a caravel (1453) or a balener (1454). The Kalsa was the quarter of fishermen and seamen, somewhat isolated from the rest of the city and looking out to sea, composed of families that had immigrated from Campania and Calabria, prepared to emigrate temporarily on boats from Marseilles in 1351, and on Venetian ones in 1396. This quarter was dominated by a familial and paternal order, the upper reaches of which were guaranteed by the authority of the *comiti* in charge of the free oarsmen gangs working on the galleys, and by the *raisi* of the madragues *tuna-fishery*, whereas an informal power reflected the huge prestige of the Continent friars, as was also the case, in the other quarters, throughout the 14th century.

Fishing, which was linked to the religious cycle of the year and to the cycles of the fish (for example, the passage of the sardines in May, and of the tuna in June), conformed to a protocapitalist form of organization, embedded in this authoritarian social order: the bosses committed themselves from November to January to deliver regular quantities to the retailers, 80 to 160 kilograms every morning, against an advance. In the crew everything was divided into parts, *a li parti*, a quarter of the product going to the backer, with fixed quotas for the boat, for the nets and for the work. The Palermitan sea was a space with an abundance of fish and extending as far as the gulf of Termini, for sardines, and that of Castellammare, where the Palermitan fishermen went temporarily to Scopello for Lent. Thus, in 1421 four fishermen bosses were established there on account of the wholesaler Nicola da Monasterio. Lent in fact required massive supplies; there ensued a double rivalry, between those selling directly and retailers, and between consumption and salting; food dealers and salters offered uniform prices and regular purchases, and would come out from the city to meet the boats and thereby create tensions among the consumers. The Commune, being concerned to avoid hoarding of fish, banned such practices. But the recurrence of its ordinances, in 1330, 1414, 1423, 1426, and again in 1444, shows just how hard it was to enforce them.

#### *The Involvement of Finance Capital: Industrial Experiments*

Older industrial activities were organized in close proximity to the water they needed. There were thus smithies between Ballarò and Piano Marina, along the torrent of the Maltempo, mills working along the Papireto, from la Guilla to Bonagia and to the Conceria, and along the Garaffo between

the Lodge of the Genoese and the Salt mill in the arsenal, and tanneries concentrated around Santa Margherita. Oil-presses, on the other hand, being driven by donkeys and mules, did not require water, but the majority of them likewise followed the routes taken by the streams, while yet others had been set up in the Feravecchia and in the Cassaro. Finally, the potters' workshops, which had at first clustered within the Albergheria, had gradually been transferred outside of the city, near to the Ponte dell'Ammiraglio, together with the tileries.

In the Conca d'Oro mills and scraper-mills proliferated when the city was undergoing a phase of expansion; their activity contracted in the second half of the 14th century, and their number was reduced for a long time to come to twenty-six mills, enough for a population of 25,000 inhabitants. Whereas in the 13th century one spoke in the plural of the fulling-mills or *battinderia* of the "contrada" of the Cassari (Cuba and Zisa), the 14th century knew only one, close to the city, in the Sabugia, attested still in 1362, and one further off, near to the Teutonic Knights' Commandery in Risalaimi, whereas the fulling-mill in Ponte di Corleone had reverted to being a simple mill, thus bearing out the decline in the woollen industry. Some women had a hand in the smallscale home industries which still survived in the 14th century, buying wool and selling *orbace*, cloth of very modest quality, or linen. In the 15th century only seamstresses and a few linen weavers might be found.

A decision taken by the Angevins, in 1278, is the first indication of the smarting awareness of technological backwardness and dependence, linked to a fear of exporting precious metals, but it barely affected Palermo: the importation of Maghrebian long-haired rams reflected a concern to develop manufacturing. The Aragonese revived this industrialization policy, encouraged specialists to settle and linked Messina, where the working and dyeing of silk was accorded a privilege of 1292, albeit unsuccessfully, with Palermo: the order of the "Umiliati" were invited around 1310 to open a workshop-school in the palace of the Slaves, alongside the royal Palace, and an aqueduct was built in order to drive their fulling-mill. From 1322 to 1329 the city entrusted the Genoese merchant Alafranchino Gallo with the task of building a manufactory for woollen cloth, granting him a series of privileges and subsidies. This was an industrial and fiscal development modelled on that attempted in Majorca, a quality drapery realised through the initiative of a weaver from Perpignan, in 1302, reliant upon the immigration of artisans from Languedoc and Tuscany. The modernity of the venture was altogether remarkable: given the absence of any artisanal network or of a consolidated "art," the municipality planned

an integrated system of manufacture housed in a single building. The lack of any customs protection caused the project to fail: such open trade policies, necessary for promoting grain exports, and the low levels of rights (*cassia* of 3%) contrast with the foresight of the Majorcans, who had been bolstered also by the intensification of agriculture in the Balearic islands, a development fostered by a plan for rural urbanization and for colonization. It would be wholly spontaneously, and in an unplanned manner, that an industrial development would emerge, with devastating consequences, in the second half of the 14th century.

### *The Sugar Industry, a Squandered Opportunity*

The sugar industry, at any rate after 1350, was in the hands of grocers bereft of financial resources. It was grafted on to the artisanal activities linked to the oil-presses: single grindstones served to crush the canes, and cauldrons of boiling water to cook the pith. Initially small “trappeti” proliferated, in the garden zones and on empty plots. Then, around 1380, the injection of financial capital led to an increase in the number and above all the size of the refineries, which would each have several grindstones, several cauldrons and several fires. Palermo was thus introduced to an industrial civilization more polluting than the textile industry of the “blue nails” of Flanders or of Florence. The resulting noise, smoke and passage of carts laden with sugar cane and firewood, the steady stream through the streets of detritus—be it the husks from the canes, the molasses or the manure—threatened the beauty of the city and the majesty of the king. In 1417, the municipality had no choice but to regulate the traffic of carts in Palermo.

Sugar cane, which was at first restricted to the quarters which ran from San Giovanni dei Lebbrosi to Maredolce and to Santo Spirito, along the Oreto, and to the environs of the Cuba and the Zisa, was triumphantly extended at the beginning of the 15th century. All the irrigable *contrade* were taken over. In 1408, the area of the plain so occupied amounted to eighty *salme*, one hundred and forty hectares, and this brought about a complete change in the rural landscape. The water, which had first of all been meagrely distributed to the gardens, was now transported everywhere. The terrain was now intensively cultivated, and to excess: the cane exhausted the soil in a matter of years, even if it received regular piles of manure. Around 1430 the Palermitan entrepreneurs had to find new fields, at the expense of the city's gabelles: at Carini, at Ficarazzi, and along the coast, at Trabia, at San Nicola di Bendormi. The capital invested

and the initiative derived from Palermo, and roads were opened in order to transport the refined sugar into the city, so as to prevent the *caricatori* from loading it directly on to the ships. In 1453 the galleys belonging to the Treasurer Jacques Cœur thus took from the *caricatore* of San Nicola di Bendormi, between Trabia and Solanto, and loaded up the sugars of Sir Tommaso Crispo.

The levels of investment required were very high. Indeed, around 1370 there is evidence of a major industry run by the great houses of the patriariate (Abbatellis, d'Afflitto, Crispo, Paruta, Speciale, Ventimiglia) and financed by sales to the Genoese merchants, who exported the sugar as far as Flanders. According to accounts dating from 1472–73, a refinery that cost 1500 florins to build could treat some 19,000 salmes of cane, burning 152 tons of wood, and over 25,000 faggots, and producing in the process over 3143 loaves of sugar. Disregarding the fixed costs, such as the leasing of the *trappeto*, expenses rose to 300 onze, or 1500 florins, of which 116 onze, or 40%, went in wages, and 26.4% in fuel. The financing of the sugar cane fields and of the refineries involved the systematic raking in of reserves: in 1436 the protonotary Leonardo de Bartholomeo borrowed fifty onze from the archbishop of Monreale. Sugar manufacture thus accelerated the circulation of capital within the upper reaches of the aristocracy, who went into debt, in a calculated fashion, in order to develop this crucial economic base. Palermitan aristocrats mortgaged their properties using the privilege of repurchase mechanism, and then sold off some quit-rents in order to finance the sugar refineries. Archbishop Simone Bologna acted thus in 1453, for the sum of fifty onze. This scramble for funds finally led to the *censo bollato* or *soggiogazione*, legitimized by a papal bull, the sale of additive rents burdening a property with a constituted and redeemable rent, like the *censo* of Catalonia, which was fixed at 8.33%; in Sicily the *censo bollato* stood at 10%; the Miglacio family thus borrowed 156 onze in 1450, having sold a rent of 15 onze 19 tarì in order to sustain his sugar cane enterprise, or *arbitrium*, and his “trappeto.” Such entrepreneurs had shifted from a real estate transaction to what was simply a transfer of credit.

The sugar industry attracted a steady stream of immigrants, specialists in irrigation and in the industry itself, sugar producers and refiners, and precipitated technological innovation, for example, the building by the Catalan architect Antoni Zorura in 1443–44 of the huge aqueduct of Ficarazzi, or the invention by an engineer from Cremona of machines for crushing the canes. Like the madrague tuna-fishery, the sugar cane served to stimulate production: first of all the ceramics industry, from

the fashioning of sugar moulds, which were smashed once the loaf had coagulated and hardened, then the production of bricks, which were rare and expensive in Sicily, for the ovens; it also required huge grindstones, hardwood planks for the presses, and copper cauldrons and hemp sacks, attracting itinerant coppersmiths who patched up the cauldrons and creating a demand for raw materials that were rare and quickly exhausted. The industry imported huge quantities of firewood: in 1417 the twenty-six “trappeti” operative in the city required 1675 tons of logs. The wood, chiefly consisting of cork-oak in enormous lengths, weighing forty kilograms, was brought in by sea from the mountains of San Calogero, from Bonfornello, from the Madonies, from the Nebrodes, and from Partinico, with from forty to eighty tons on each ship, and up to 160 and 480 tons. The fuel was unloaded and stacked up on the Piano della Marina, and then distributed. The mountains suffered deforestation while the fields for their part were exhausted. In 1393 only sixteen hectares in the Conca d’Oro had been devoted to sugar, but the area would increase tenfold, rising to 162 hectares by 1416, a first peak, although it had then fallen to sixty hectares in 1437.

Sugar had altered the rhythms of agricultural life and of industrial work by imposing an intense nocturnal activity, as required by the irrigation and the uninterrupted work in the refineries. There was no longer any dominical rest, and high wages rewarded the workers involved, while a rational use of the religious traditions of the Jews meant entrusting them with the crucial Sunday shifts, taken on in exchange for the Sabbath day.

#### *The Madragues Tuna-Fisheries*

The huge enterprises involved in catching the tuna—known as madragues *tuna-fisheries*—existed in great numbers around Palermo, having been established in the 12th–13th century, with some being located in the port itself, at San Giorgio and at Arenella. Others were established in the 15th century, at Sferracavallo, Mondello, and at Capicello/Sant’Erasmo and Sant’Elia. Conditions were safer close to the great city and one might seek protection in the towers built as places of refuge by the Commune. During the active months, from May to July, the population of the madrague *tuna-fishery* included hundreds of men, fishermen, *tonnaroti*, porters who carried the tuna to the *apindituri* where the fish were hung and cut up, salters, specialists in the soubresade of the eggs, and persons employed in service in the “loggia,” including wet coopers, storekeepers, cooks and pantlers. A special butcher’s shop worked for this small, ephemeral town.



Among these men were numerous immigrants, freedmen, slaves habituated to the difficult tasks required of them and numerous Jews expert in salting and in the work on the eggs. Wages, which doubled between 1328 and 1440, were high, 40–45 tari a season, 80 to 90 carlins of silver and up to three onze for the *capimastri* and the technicians responsible for pickling. The madragues *tuna-fishery* constitute an example of an embedded economy, with their own hierarchies dominated by the patriarchal authority of the *raisi*, founded on competences handed down within the same families for generation after generation. As in the case of fishing, the organization was carried out *a li parti*, with customary shares allotted to the *raisi* (3 to 5%), the *capiguardia* (17 or 19%, plus one fish per boat and half of the eggs), the sailors, but also to those who supplied the anchors and the nets. Everyone sold on their fish, immediately, just as soon as the contract was sealed, to the salters' companies. But shares in the partnership (divided into 24 company carats) had also to be sold to those who arranged for the increasingly necessary financing of the fishing industry.

The madragues *tuna-fishery* had to mobilize high levels of capital. Thus, in 1415, Solanto was valued at 5500 florins in fixed capital. The nobles (Milite in 1323, Calvellis in 1350, Doria in 1383) gave ground to the merchants and moneychangers of the 14th century: in 1328 Manfredi Boccardorzo was thus *gabellotto* of the madrague of the Arenella in collaboration with a *raisi* from Trapani, at the head of 46 sailors. In the 15th century, it was families from the patriciate who specialized, the Mastrantonio at San Giorgio and in the Arenella, the Bellacera at Isola delle Femmine and at Solanto, the Omodei at Sferracavallo, the Baiamonte at Solanto. The risks were high: Antonio Crapona and Giovanni Bonconte thus went bankrupt at Isola delle Femmine in 1451. The great tuna-fisheries caught around 1000 tuna a season, producing 951 barrels at San Giorgio in 1428, with some 38 tons of high quality meat, valued at 315 onze, 1575 florins, and 500 barrels at Solanto in 1440, with twenty-two tons of flesh requiring over 15 square metres of salt. The income followed the general curve of the Palermitan economy, with a long contraction up until the recovery around 1450: at Solanto, it thus fell from 230 onze in 1381 to 250 in 1396, and to 150 in 1451 before climbing back up again to 180 onze in 1455.

Exports of salted tuna, though still modest, with a few thousand barrels going to Liguria, Tuscany, Rome and Naples, and even to Avignon and the Maghreb, sustained production and took over from the demand of Sicilian consumers. Muleteers transported huge quantities of rock salt to the madragues tuna-fisheries, mainly from Cammarata, and Palermo also imported a little sea salt from Ibiza and Sardinia. The city was also an

important market for material equipment: it supported an active artisanate, which produced nets, ropes, barrels and cork floats. Fruitful outlets which paid well, and also played a part in fostering the economic development of the hinterland, since muleteers brought in wine, grain, salt, and small livestock on foot, with an abattoir adjoining the tuna-fishery.

## THE UPPER ECONOMY

### *The Political Conjuncture*

From 1239 the Sicilian state had elaborated a veritable economic policy based upon the construction of a second tier of taxation founded upon export royalties for wheat, paid as custom dues on exports. The starting-point was a letter from Frederick II of 12 November 1239 which reduced the export royalty from one third of the price of the wheat to one fifth. Between 1270 and 1280, a rapid phase of expansion saw Sicilian grain exports climbing from 30,000 to 80,000 *salme*, that is to say, from 80,000 to 220,000 hectoliters,  $\frac{2}{3}$  of wheat and  $\frac{1}{3}$  of barley; export attained early one twentieth of overall production, one twelfth to one tenth of the production suitable for breadmaking, but the tax burden remained heavy: 7  $\frac{1}{2}$  tarì per *salma* when demand was weak, 9 tarì in 1276–77 when it was strong.

After 1282, and in order to finance their wars, the Aragonese of Sicily systematically lowered the price of the export royalty to 3 and 4 tarì per *salma*. Around 1338, the royalty represented 42.3% of the price of the wheat when conditions were favourable, but the very weak price of Sicilian corn allowed it to remain competitive. Whereas the Angevins of Naples went into partnership with the great Florentine companies in order to establish a genuine monopoly, the Aragonese devised a quite deliberate export policy: the choice of a low royalty took the export share to over 10% of production in 1307–1309 (50,000 *salme*, 137,500 hectoliters), to 30% in 1407–1408 (352,000 hectoliters), to 31% in 1455–56 (266,000 hectoliters); in these exceptional years, they went beyond the 15% percentage, which remained stable between 1550 and 1590. Around 1407, the monarchy anticipated average exports of 250,000 hectoliters per year; the low averages during the following decades, 80,000/110,000 hectoliters, would prove a great disappointment, and this would continue until around 1455, when confidence returned after a revival, and average of 250,000 to 265,000 hectoliters. Sicily had managed to retain its market share, whereas other export structures were collapsing, such as Sardinia, which had exported

between 50,000 and 80,000 hectoliters before 1360, and Puglia which went as high as 600,000 or more in 1311 and still attained 375,000 hectoliters in 1329.

*Palermo as a Commercial Centre: The Instruments of its Success*

*A Centre for Chartering and Insuring Ships*

Whereas Messina had from the 12th century taken on the role of a port of call and of a technical platform for the routes to the East, Palermo had more or less constantly been a centre for the chartering and insuring of vessels, and also an important grain market. Palermo marketplace, the meeting-point of the merchants from the Italian, and then from the Catalan, cities, had been one of the laboratories of the Mediterranean economic world. The new commercial and financial instruments were in evidence there at an early date.<sup>6</sup> The payment instruments, there as elsewhere, enabled merchants to compensate for monetary dearth. The letter of change made its first appearance in Palermo as early as 1309; changes and rechanges developed from 1340 onwards and made it possible to finance commercial ventures. But financial instruments only began to flourish in the 15th century in close association with the needs of the Court of Alfonso V at Gaeta, and latterly at Naples. Bank current accounts developed from the end of the 14th century, enabling payments by *girata*, or from one account to another. Merchants, patricians, artisans and agricultural entrepreneurs all had accounts with the Pisans of Palermo. We have evidence of *dicta*, or bank to bank transfers, as early as 1436 in the upper echelons of the administration and amongst financiers at Court. Payment using scripta as compensation, without cash, made possible an embryonic form of "clearing" between creditors at one and the same bank, without however "dry" exchange being established. One should also note the absence of consolidated debt, of a *Monte* on the Florentine model, for lack of a strong central urban authority.

Being signs of a recurrent monetary penury, barter and payment in kind were instruments which had a modest but permanent use, as when imported cloths were exchanged for the wheat and cheeses stockpiled by the local merchants and by barons. Thus, in 1442, Giovanni Insinga, a Florentine merchant, exchanged goods with the Genovese Giovanni

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<sup>6</sup> Ranieri Zeno, *Documenti per servire per la storia del diritto marittimo nei secoli XIII e XIV* (Turin, 1936).

Barbarussa of Portovenere, the owner of a ship anchored in the port, receiving 1,000 *salme* of wheat, which the latter would load at Licata, in return for cloths and iron to the value of 2166 florins.

### *The Transporters' Relay*

The Sicilian economy's great opportunity lay in its dependence upon the most convenient form of transport, in size and in speed, namely, naval transport. The galley, with limited tonnage, less than 130 tons in fact, was still used in the strife-ridden conjuncture of the end of the 13th century, but then yielded to ships with rounded sterns, naves, with a higher tonnage, from 200 to as much as 500 tons, capable of using the Lateen sail in order to sail into the prevailing winds, from the north and the north-west. But it was the early adoption of the "Bayonnais" cogue, with square sail and stern-post rudder, which sustained the crucial rise in the production and trading of grain, from 1320 onwards; a large cogue carried 3000 *sau-mata* of grain, or 8250 hectoliters, 630 tons. Palermo regularly welcomed nations which were pioneers in the field of naval transportation, and their initiatives were reflected in the fleet of grain ships which were anchored in the port: the Catalans and the cogue at the end of the 13th century, the Genoese and the *panfilo*, which was lighter, around 1350, and which was a response to the crisis in the demand for grain and to the diversification in Sicilian trade, sugars, tuna, cheeses, and then the Basques at the end of the 14th century, with new vessels, such as brigantines, baleners, caravels, and finally the Ragusans, when large carriers were once again necessary, given the renewed demand for big grain cargoes.

The Palermitan merchant milieu had effective instruments at its disposal: a safe haven, the port served as a refuge where the exporting nations could pass the time between the purchase of the wheat and its actual delivery to the waterside. It was, however, small, scarcely more than 150 metres in diameter. Trading vessels cast anchor outside, in front of the church of Santa Lucia, without any very great protection. The construction of a mole, planned in the original phase of expansion, in 1331, would only be realized between 1440 and 1460 by the Benedictine fra Giuliano Maiale and would cost over a thousand onze. Decorated with antique columns, it became one of the attractions of the city. The lack of quays also meant that goods had to be transported in lighters and that *barcaroli* and dockers (*bastasü*) were intensely busy, forming a powerful pressure group, capable in 1422 of wrecking the already half-completed project of a wooden wharf which would have made it possible to load boats up directly.

The port of Palermo, separated from the *massarie* by the chain of mountains framing the Conca d'Oro, was not an outlet well-suited to the cereali-culture of the Val de Mazara; the harvested grain was in fact transported to the export ports on mules. There were therefore ports and *caricatori* closer to the Palermitan *mandre* and *massarie* which served as outlets, namely, Termini and Castellammare del Golfo. Notarized contracts also provided for more distant loadings, throughout the whole extent of the Sicily of the *latifondo*, in Sciacca, Agrigento, Licata. Frustrated by the inconvenience of the road system, the fair at Palermo never enjoyed as much success as the one at Messina; permission for it being granted in 1348, in order to remedy a quite terrifying set of circumstances, and lasting a month on either side of the festival of Saint Cristina (24 July), it coincided neither with the actual availability of the harvest, which was ready only in September, nor with the arrival of the cloth and merchandise that the Sicilians bought, such as French and Flemish cloth, Milanese weapons, and latterly Catalan fabrics, all of which were disembarked in the spring.

### *The Melting-Pot*

A homogeneous quarter grew up around the port, at the foot of the Amalfitania in the 12th century, on either side of the street of the Pisans in the 13th century. There were no longer any "national" streets, for the quarter was a melting-pot, particularly in linguistic terms: coexistence permitted the exchange of information and of goods. This quarter, Porta Patitelli or Conceria, held most of the shops and warehouses: in the 14th century, 80 out of some 130 accounts refer to it, whereas only a dozen or so refer to the Cassaro, the former commercial centre from the 11th-12th century, and fourteen to Ballaro, the market of the Albergheria. There was apparently less concentration in the 15th century, when the aristocracy chose to move downhill and reside closer to the port, and the shops spread out into the other quarters, mainly in the Albergheria, while the warehouses were still clustered around the port. The lodges were the heart of the merchant quarter, that of the Pisans, attested as early as the 13th century, then that of the Genovese and of the Catalans, evidence for which is available to us from 1300. The personnel in such institutions were supposed to support the efforts of their fellow nationals, two "nunzii," one of whom was a sworn broker, for the lodge of the Catalans, one ship-broker, Augusto de Lecceriis of Pavia, in 1351, himself a small-scale lender, in the lodge of the Genoese. Consulates resolved conflicts within each "nation" and defended its interests and those of persons under their jurisdiction, that of the

Catalans, attested since 1292, and that of the Genoese, from 1309 onwards; other forms of representation were ephemeral, set up in response to sudden influxes of sailors and merchants, Narbonnais and Neapolitans in the 14th century, Florentines, the French of Jacques Coeur and Venetians around 1450.

A network of brokers, *sansari* or *mediani*, specialized in the sale of slaves, in banking or in the sugar industry. They numbered 41 in 1389. They were flanked by public vendors, male and female, and counted Jews, neophytes, Pisan and Catalan immigrants, all officially sworn in and vested with *fides publica*. What marked them out and what they had in common was experience and technical expertise, a good knowledge of the market and of the products. As everywhere else, they were excluded from actual trading, whereas innkeepers for their part were debarred from brokerage. Other mainstays of commercial activity, the moneychangers, *campsores* or *bankerii*, either Sicilian or of Tuscan origin or even Amalfitan, belonged to reputable families, of notaries or of canons. We witness their involvement in the retail business—as was the case with, for example, Biagio de Arenis, between 1360 and 1377, a man who traded in pepper, cloth and cattle—and in agricultural ventures and in the running of the communal finances, as was the case with Manfredi Boccadorzo, who was of Pisan extraction, who owned a *massaria* and who, in 1329, took on lease the gabelles of the *Secrezia*, and of the municipality, for over 5500 onze.

Whereas Palermitan women rarely ventured outside their homes or beyond their alley, and were excluded, with the exception of a few laundresses, from the world of work, the market economy did in the end bring about the emergence of businesswomen, innkeepers in charge of *fondaci*, whose role was hardly an honourable one, “public vendors,” or brokers, who, little heeding their own honour, would pay visits to private residences and propose the selling of haberdasher’s wares.

#### *The Merchant Centre, an “Offshore” Milieu*

The Palermitan trading milieu was composite and ever-changing: between 1300 and 1350 it was dominated by the ingenuity and organizational skills of the many Tuscans, from Pisa or from Florence, but was also host to the citizens of the smaller Tuscan cities, who accounted for one-quarter or one-third of the total number of foreign merchants. They clustered around the agents of the great Florentine companies, Peruzzi, Bardi and Acciajuoli, and of more modest companies also, Gambacurta of Pisa, Guidalotti of Florence, Cambi of Siena. In imitation of the Tuscans we

find the Catalans, who were less numerous (around 20% of the merchants based in Palermo) and less effective, and had a number of less powerful hubs, among them the Mitjavila and Spaer companies, Vall and Sabastida, Puigvert, Molins and Cabanell, and Sa Fortea. In the main, though, commercial activity depended upon artisanal *in commendam* contracts, wares being given to a trader to be sold abroad for a reward of 25%. Everything changed, however, around 1350. In an economic downturn the Tuscans were shaken by the liquidation of the great companies, and the lasting breach between Sicily and Avignon prevented the banking companies from taking root; the Genovese, political allies of the Chiaramonte government, forged close ties with the Palermitan merchant milieu, without however establishing an enduring presence, but basing their activities on the solidarity of the "albergo," on informal cooperation and on letters of procuratory. At the end of the century, after the peace with Naples and the monarchical restoration, the weight of the Catalan presence, in terms of merchant numbers, began to make itself felt, but, for want of large amounts of capital, they left the crucial trade to a revived Tuscan milieu, consisting in the main of Pisans, who were resident in Palermo and Sicilianized. The Palermitan milieu functioned as a melting-pot: Tuscan families close to the administration (d'Afflitto, Aiutamicrosto, de Benedictis, Crazona, Falcono, Gaetani, La Grua, Paruta, Settimo), cloth sellers (Cisario, Graciano), notaries (Bonconti, Brixia, Rustico), jurists (Bologna, Omodei) and artisans collaborated closely with the Jewish entrepreneurs (Cusintinu, Cuynu, Taguil).

Largescale commerce in part eluded the market: the "stock exchange" in Sicilian corn was a complex phenomenon, since one had first to make contact with the lords, and then buy *royalties* at the Court. But the merchant milieu, once it had regrouped, exchanged information and goods: without appearing to be an "international Republic of money," Palermo presented precocious examples of understandings between the great merchants of the various competing "nations." In the 15th century, insurance policies regularly joined together a cluster of Pisan and Catalan merchants in order to guarantee the voyage of a ship leaving Palermo or a *caricatore*.

This merchant milieu, which had developed of its own accord, did not depend upon the presence of the Court. It was sufficiently large and cohesive to manage itself to some degree, and to create its own mercantile law: of eighty known commercial disputes, only four ended up in court, at the Gran Corte, which pronounced three resolute sentences and entrusted the fourth to an arbitrator. Twenty other controversies were submitted

to arbitration, four to a consular Court, between compatriots, eight to arbitrators chosen within the “nation,” eight others to neutral arbitrators or to a jury combining eminent members of two “nations.” Investigation was conducted *a la mercantisca*, it was rapid, judgements were dictated according to equity pure and simple and, save where an appeal was made to the Gran Corte, they were readily accepted. Commercial law therefore followed practice, partly codified at Amalfi and at Barcelona, rather than the *Customs* of Palermo or the *Constitutions* of the kingdom. Its unification made it possible to set up a merchants’ consulate, in 1440, entrusted then to two Palermitans, one of whom was of Pisan origin. The effects of the contradictory privileges of the merchant “nations” were thereby allayed, and in 1312 the main merchant nations, Genoese, Catalan and Sicilian, were put on an equal footing.

### *Exchange and the Circulation of Money*

#### *The Portal of Western Sicily*

The merchants purchased in Palermo the fruits of cerealiculture and stockbreeding, grain and cheeses, intended for export, but the city was only to a very limited degree the loading port by which purchases were conveyed in transit: according to the Portolano registers, barely 1% of the wheat exported from Sicily in 1407–1408, in 1455–56 and in 1460–61, 1 to 2% according to the contracts of sale and of charter. Only small cargoes left the port, on rudimentary craft, from 50 to 150 *saumata*, and small boats, up to 400 *saumata*. The big cargoes merely stayed for a period until going to the embarkation port. Crossing the mountains was an expensive business: transportation costs climbed to a little over one third of the price of the corn at production and on average accounted for 28.75% of the cost of the wheat delivered to Palermo, while it only accounted for 10% of the cost of the cheese delivered for embarkation. A mountain crossing cost the same as naval transport from Palermo to Naples, to Pisa or to Genoa, between 21% and 23% of the price of the grain at Palermo, depending upon the decade in question, a little less than for Barcelona, where it would be 28% to 31%. Conversely, it was from Palermo that two thirds of the barrels of tuna exported by the island were shipped in 1407–1408, along with virtually all, that is, 97%, of the sugar, some 51 tons, and also a small part, 4.6%, of the cheese, some 17 tons. Furthermore, according to the testimonies of the notarized contracts, the port of Palermo had a sustained role in exporting cheese: 52% of the quantities sold and exported from Sicily before 1400 and almost 43% between 1400 and 1460.



Palermo was on the other hand the main portal and point of transfer for imported products, and first and foremost for cloth, but it was not the only one. A proportion of the cloth also went by way of Messina; Palermitan notarial records allow us to draw up a map depicting the redistribution to the drapers of the “estates” of the cloths imported through Palermo: prior to 1350 it extended across the entire Val de Mazara and as far as Piazza and Castrogiovanni, then it shrank, and was limited to Trapani, Alcamo, Corleone and to the Madonies; up until around 1400, the economic conjuncture was mediocre, betokening an enduring crisis for Palermo. The market opened up again in the 15th century, leaving to Messina only north-eastern Sicily, from Catania to Cefalù, with Valdemone for its part expanding rapidly; Messina then accounted for one third. At the end of the century, in 1492, at the time of the expulsion of the Jews, statistics recording Jewish drapers’ purchases from the wholesalers of Palermo show that the capital’s commercial reach extended as far as Syracuse, whilst Messina and Palermo were rivals in the supplying of Catania, Castrogiovanni, Piazza and Paternò. Demographic development and the enrichment of the island sustained rising cloth imports into the capital, from 17,000 onze (85,000 florins) in 1407–1408 to an average of 28,140 onze (140,700 florins) between 1466 and 1474, and to 56,680 onze in 1496–97.

#### *The Commercial Reach of Palermo*

A network of small town merchants, drapers and haberdashers, and a few grocers gravitated around Palermo, selling reexported goods and collecting cheeses and grain. The draper merchants of Palermo drew up agreements with local notables, notaries and petty nobles, with Tuscan traders in the first half of the 14th century, and latterly with the Jews, in order to set up cloth shops, and to buy wheat and cheeses. These contracts delineate vast swathes of Sicily: Calatafimi, Castrogiovanni (Enna), Girgenti (Agrigento) and Termini in 1307–1309, Alcamo, Cammarata, Castrogiovanni, Giuliana, Polizzi, Terranova (Gela), Troina in the 14th century, Girgenti and Salemi at the beginning of the 15th century. High levels of investment were involved, 40, 50, 100, 140 onze, from 200 to 700 florins. In 1351, the *post mortem* inventory of Gregorio Denti, a merchant draper, offered an opportunity to describe the geographical area, which was larger still, covered by his sales and partnerships entered into: his coffers held only a little over 22 onze and cloth to the value of 20 onze, but his credits, 31 in all, amounted to some 162 onze, 90% of his fortune; his most important credits were at Mineo (80 onze), at Salemi (thirteen onze), at Polizzi

(seven onze), with more modest ones at Caltagirone, and he had invested a capital of 35 onze in a partnership at Troina; we also know that he had sold cloth to a Jew from Djerba.

Starting in Palermo, Palermitan traders, some Sicilian but most of them foreigners, and these latter more numerous and more active, had put in place a network of more or less regular relationships brought to light through letters of payment, and later through letters of change addressed to correspondents. A space was created, limited at first to the central Mediterranean and sustained by the Tuscan companies: Genoa, Pisa, Cagliari, Tunis, Gabes around 1310; economic ties with Naples were then sundered, but strong links survived with the Maghreb, and more modest ones with Catalonia. The emergence of Majorcan merchants, around 1320, added Majorca, Perpignan and Narbonne to this network, whilst the Maghreb passed into the background. To judge by the testimony of the *Pratiche de mercatura*, particularly those of Pegolotti, the sea then opened up to Palermitan trade a truly vast world, stretching from the Tyrrhenian and the Iberian Levant to Romania, Anatolia and the Genoese Crimea, and to Cyprus and Syria, destinations that Genoese overseas notaries confirm. After 1340, the collapse of the great Florentine companies and the fading of the Catalan, the Genoese, backed by a system of flexible letters of procuratory, reestablished a general circulation of goods between Tunis, Tripoli, Rhodes, Gaeta, Naples, Bonifacio, Valencia, Montpellier and Avignon. Around 1370, peace made it possible to reestablish relations with Naples and Calabria, while the regular passage of Venetian galleys from Flanders established the first links with Seville, Sanlucar de Barrameda, Bruges and Southampton, where they carried Palermitan sugar. In the first half of the 15th century, the return of Tuscans, Pisans, and then Florentines, backed by new instruments of credit (“dry exchange”), from 1430 onwards, extended this network still further: Basel, where the council was meeting, Rome, Lucca, Geneva, Montpellier, Constantinople and Alexandria.

#### *Towards an “Extra-Territorial” Economy*

These long-range exchanges were no longer necessarily centred upon Palermo. Banking and insurance, in particular, rendered themselves independent of the places of residence of the merchant-bankers: in 1443, an insurance policy was thus contracted by a Catalan with a group of Palermitan insurers on a cargo which was to go from Naples to Cagliari, and then to Majorca, Barcelona and Valencia.

The war of conquest waged in the kingdom of Naples by Alfonso the Magnanimous gave rise to intense economic and financial activity: it was through Palermo that the fiscal drain passed, guaranteed by the Pisan bank, a bank of exiled and stateless persons, associated with the Catalans. The circulation, by means of letters of change, of the sums needed for the conquest of Naples preempted the exit of precious metals from Sicily and the recriminations of the parliaments. The transit by way of Palermo of weapons, gunpowder, horses and provisions for the army sustained the circulation of countless letters of change. The banks involved were those of Simone Risignano, of Pietro Gaetani, of the Agliata, of Gaspar Casasaja, and of Ranieri Aiutamicristo. They multiplied the letters of change on Gaeta, and then on Naples, and the changes and rechanges needed to advance money. In 1437 the five great Pisan banks lent the king 6750 onze in gold (33,750 florins). In return they were granted a temporary monopoly over royal affairs: Pietro Afflitto was thus assured of receiving the revenues from the *Secrezia* of Palermo, plus 5000 florins a year. Veritable plurinational banks were thereby created: the Pisan Adinolfo del Fornaio and the Catalan Denis Sarriera thus went into partnership, in 1444, with the high-ranking Palermitan civil servant Olivo Sottile. The monarchy kept a close watch on the frequent bankruptcies that occurred, and then set up a commission of bankers or of jurists to decide upon the "bankruptcy money", the proportion which would be reimbursed. The bankruptcy of Denis Sarriera, in 1450, was thus a veritable affair of State: the king gave orders for the banker to be tortured. After the conquest of Naples, the Treasury, administered by Catalans of merchant origin, made virtually exclusive use of one bank, a Neapolitan one, belonging to Giovanni Miroballo, which served it as a deposit bank collected the hearth-taxes, advanced it sums of money; it was set up in Palermo and run by the Pisan Giovanni Vivaia.<sup>7</sup>

Then, under John II, there was the war of Catalonia; in Palermo it mobilized a new generation of banks, Aiutamicristo, Mastrantonio, Rigio. Under Ferdinand the Catholic, State administration and banking continued to be closely associated: families of high-ranking civil servants from Saragossa, *conversos* devoted to the transnational monarchy, the La Cavallarias and the Sanchez, caused the precious blood of the State, money, to circulate: Girolamo Sanchez went into partnership in Palermo with the Lombard

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<sup>7</sup> Carmelo Trasselli, *Note per la storia dei banchi in Sicilia nel XV secolo. Parte II I Banchieri e i loro affari* (Palermo, 1968).

Ambrogio Levi. Together, in 1492–93, they ensured by means of letters of payment the transfer of the huge sums which the Jews could not carry in cash to the kingdom of Naples, the profits from the selling of their inheritances and of their businesses.

#### CONCLUSION

The conjuncture of the 14th and 15th centuries was marked by a long downwards trend which was not interrupted until around 1450: the yield from the urban gabelles, of which we have very intermittent knowledge through receipts registered in the presence of a notary, enables us to plot a rough curve combining the various facets of the urban economy. However, we do not know what percentage in each case, which anyway would have changed, was deducted, and this condemns us to ignorance of the overall figure. Consumption gabelles, income from which reflects fast food catering and prosperity, allow us to glimpse an inflexion around 1350, and a steep fall, by one-half, between the beginning of the 14th century and 1400, when it underwent a slow, uneven recovery without take-off and an abrupt decline of over 10% after the expulsion of the Jews. Thus the gabelles for rapid street repairs, the *strificzaria*, fell from fourteen onze in 1308–1309 to nine in 1351–52, only to climb back up to twelve in 1445–48 and to 18 in 1496–97.

The administrative accounts of the *Secrezia*, which administered all of the Royal Court's gabelles, provide a synthesis of the consumer gabelles, of the *dohana* levied on transactions and on the tolls paid at the city gates and at the port, together with those paid when exporting secondary goods, such as cheese or salted tuna. It climbed to 4700 onze in 1326 and to 4000 onze the following year. Sources are then lacking until 1406–1407, but in the first decade of the 15th century we find an average of 4700 onze: the spectacular rise in grain exports, and in reexported cloths, together with sugar cane gabelle, compensated for weak consumption. Like Messina, Palermo was sustained by the dynamism of its hinterland, by its purchases and by successful cerealiculture for export. The surviving receipts then indicate an inflexion: 3438 onze on average from 1420 to 1430, 3454 onze from 1430 to 1440. Recovery later followed, and to a remarkable degree, although the urban population hardly grew at all. An isolated figure, namely, 7093 onze in 1489–90, suggests a doubling in tax revenues.

This conjuncture testifies to the stability of an economy founded on the draining of landed and fiscal resources, on the abundant consumption

of high quality goods, and on the transportation of products, with raw materials all, excepting sugar, from the island itself, and with industrial and artisanal products imported in huge quantities. The Palermitan economy may be interpreted as a success, indeed its prosperity was happily translated into the urban landscape, into artistic creation and into the city's emergence as one of the pivots of the transnational monarchy of the Trástamara. We should however not forget the price that was paid for such a success, namely, the decline in artisanal production, the aetiolation of technical expertise, the perennial effects of a dualism within Palermo, and the reinforced weight of the landed aristocracy, all outcomes wholly at odds with the programme elaborated after the Vespers by the city and the monarchy.

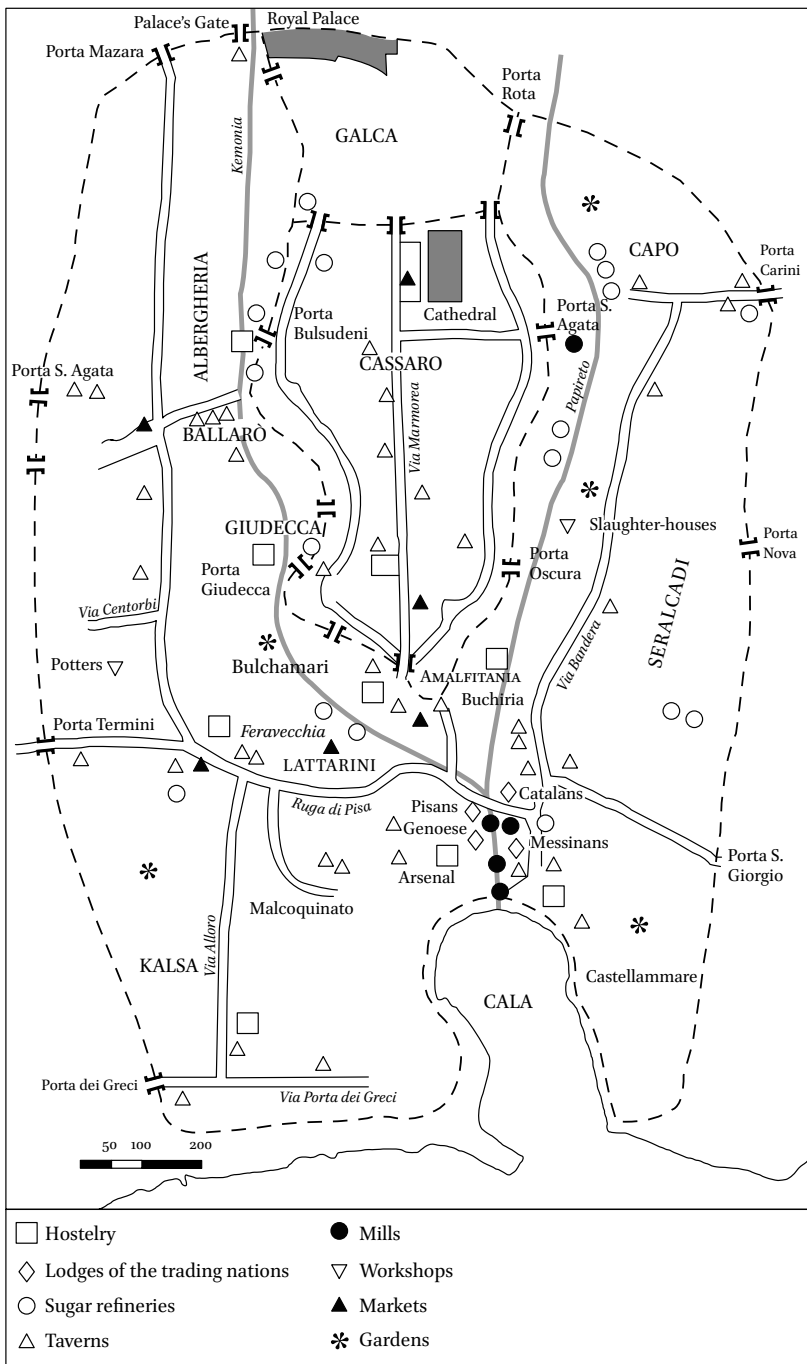


Fig. 8.1. An economical map of Palermo (XIIIth–XVth centuries)



Fig. 8.2. An economical map of the Conca d'Oro (XIIIth–XVth centuries)

## PALERMO IN THE 14TH–15TH CENTURY: THE URBAN SOCIETY

E. Igor Mineo

### INTRODUCTION. THE FORMATION OF A NEW COMMUNITY AT THE END OF THE 13TH CENTURY

The chronological limits of this essay cannot be fixed with absolute precision, since they are determined by the type of perspective we choose to adopt regarding the “social” world of a great city. Our point of departure is, however, traditional. Despite the new lines of enquiry developed over the last twenty-five years, the Vespers, which by tradition serve to cut Sicilian history in two (before and after 1282), help us to impose order upon the phenomena with which we are concerned. Our destination is far less easy to pin down, and we therefore need to identify more than one: 1392, and the restoration of royal rule, and 1516, which saw the death of Ferdinand the Catholic (and the definitive, though very troubled, passage to a new, wholly “Spanish” epoch), are dates of crucial importance for the entire island; as was 1450 for the capital, on account of a revolt that reveals much about the social geography of the city midway through the 15th century.

The social processes that interest us here were not of course determined by the Vespers as such, indeed some important preconditions had been established earlier. In the latter half of the 13th century two discontinuities in the institutional context had occurred. We cannot tell exactly when, although it was probably after the middle of the century, the text of the customs was drafted, as a system of rules in some way produced by the community;<sup>1</sup> later, in the Angevin period, a tendency arose, which after 1282 would become irreversible, to elect the city’s officials and not to have them be appointed by the royal court.<sup>2</sup> We are concerned here with

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<sup>1</sup> The texts were edited, with a commentary, by Vito La Mantia, *Antiche consuetudini delle città di Sicilia* (Palermo, 1900); see Ennio Igor Mineo, “Norme cittadine, sviluppo istituzionale, dinamica sociale: sulla scritturazione consuetudinaria in Sicilia tra XIII e XIV secolo,” in Gabriella Rossetti, ed., *Legislazione e prassi istituzionale nell’Europa medievale. Tradizioni normative, ordinamenti, circolazione mercantile (secoli XI–XV)* (Naples, 2001), pp. 341–61.

<sup>2</sup> Fabrizio Titone, *Governments of the “Universitates”: urban communities of Sicily in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries* (Turnhout, 2009), pp. 18–24.



two very strong signals indicating the presence of a new form of community, contrasting with that of the cities in the Norman and Swabian periods. These discontinuities emerged gradually in the second half of the 13th century; and yet they seem to be borne out by a documentary “mutation” occurring in Palermo as late as the beginning of the 14th century, and involving the sudden appearance of acts produced by local officials (and of a rudimentary “archive” of the city as well).

The importance of the Vespers for my argument therefore lies in its major consequence, namely, in the formation, together with a new and smaller Kingdom, of a different institutional structure, in which the urban “peripheries” (amongst them many densely populated centres), took on a more prominent, and more independent function than in the past. This change concerned the *demesne*, that is to say, the space common to the Crown and to almost all the cities, and found expression precisely in the self-government of these latter. In this context Palermo’s location within the royal demesne is beyond dispute: in the sources, emphasis is often laid upon the specificity of the Palermitan urban space as demesne space, distinct from feudal and ecclesiastical space alike. This institutional specificity was mirrored first and foremost in the rules for the election of officials, in which process protagonists from the feudal aristocracy could play no part.<sup>3</sup>

This essay is therefore concerned with the impact of the growing institutional autonomy of a great city upon the characteristic features of the wider society or, if you will, with the attribution of a clearer community status to one of the most heavily populated urban centres of the peninsula (between 40,000 and 50,000 inhabitants in 1277). One symptom of this transformation is evident in the change in the city’s form by contrast with the Norman-Swabian period. The macroscopic differences were two-fold. Firstly, in place of a multi-ethnic, linguistically plural city we now find a centre homogenized under the sign of “Latinity.” Indeed, the spatial arrangement of the Norman city had served to distinguish between the inhabitants in terms of a complex series of criteria, first of all linguistic and religious, but the process of Christianization and Latinization (which, at the end of the 12th century, was already under way) had not yet defined clearly distinct spheres. At the end of the 13th century (so far as we

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<sup>3</sup> See Adelaide Baviera Albanese, “Studio introduttivo,” in Lia Citarda, ed., *ACFUP 3* (Palermo, 1984), pp. XX–XXIX, Ennio Igor Mineo, “Città e società urbana nell’età di Federico III: le élites e la sperimentazione istituzionale,” in *Federico III d’Aragona re di Sicilia (1296–1337)* (Palermo, 1997), pp. 128–31.

know), this pluralism had not disappeared but it had become somewhat attenuated, or its meaning had altered: a significant Jewish presence was indeed still in evidence, but the Muslims had all but disappeared, and the Greeks had been in large measure absorbed. As a consequence of these developments, such cultural pluralism as remained was within the Latin and Catholic sphere, and was fed by migratory flows from many different Italian areas (especially from the central and northern cities) and, more broadly, from Europe (especially from the Iberian peninsula). The second macroscopic difference concerns the fact that, in place of a composite city, consisting of two fortified centres, the Cassaro and the Khālīṣa/Kalsa, plus three suburbs outside the walls,<sup>4</sup> there was now a unified city divided into five “quarters,” of which only one, the Cassaro, could be traced back, spatially and in name, to the Islamic and Norman past. The other four quarters, the Seralcadi, the Albergheria, Porta Patitelli and the Kalsa, were administratively engendered areas which only in part corresponded to the pre-existing territorial units (from the Islamic and Norman-Swabian periods); indeed, their boundaries had been demarcated at a late date (probably in the Angevin period, when the term “quarter” itself made its first appearance).<sup>5</sup> The city would retain this same physiognomy up until its reinvention at the end of the 16th century.

#### THE ARISTOCRATIC MAP IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE 14TH CENTURY

This space was inhabited by a large population whose characteristics were apparently not very formalized. Indeed, historians have been struck by the relative “informality” of Palermo’s social structure, if compared with that of other great European cities. I have in mind here the almost total absence of tangible reflections of collective representations deriving from the community’s history, the sheer difficulty of recognizing precisely who the different social actors were, and the general character of the urban microcosm, which, by comparison with other cities at this same date, was relatively lacking in corporate structures.

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<sup>4</sup> This would seem to be how things were at the time of Ibn Ḥawqal’s description in the 10th century, see Adalgisa De Simone, “Palermo araba,” in *Storia di Palermo*, II (Palermo, 2000), pp. 90–98.

<sup>5</sup> On these aspects of the city’s reorganization, see Elena Pezzini, “Articolazioni territoriali a Palermo tra XII e XIV secolo,” *MEFRM* 116/2 (2004), 729–801, and in particular pp. 734–38, 787–90.

The relatively undefined nature of the social actors could, generally speaking, be connected to the fact that between the 13th and the 14th centuries the process of constructing a new political arena in the city, one based upon the principle of autonomy, had only just begun. The difficulty of putting a face to such actors is mitigated the higher up the social scale we go, but even the sphere of political pre-eminence has blurred outlines, precisely because the rules and roles of the new order still seem, in retrospect at any rate, to be in the making.

In short, there were criteria of individual distinction, or modes by which the prestige of some categories were recognised, but Palermo lacked a privileged space endowed with sufficiently formalized characteristics. The city as such did not produce enduring distinctions between defined groups, and, conversely, it was traversed by “external” signs: in particular those deriving from the hierarchical order of the Kingdom, inherited from the Norman-Swabian past, which no matter how precarious or on the way to being rewritten, was nonetheless clear-cut, and showed scant regard for the urban stage.

The above interpretation is borne out by certain sumptuary norms promulgated by Frederick III between the 1310s and the 1320s,<sup>6</sup> and again by a number of later royal interventions, which were more circumscribed and based this time on urban petitions. Frederick III’s norms were intended to apply to the whole Kingdom but, as we shall shortly see, they were of particular relevance to Palermo. We can subdivide them into two groups, on the one hand statutes 86 to 104, on the other statutes 105 to 107. It is best to begin with these latter, which were explicitly addressed to “counts, magnates, barons, knights and all those who receive prebends from the court”<sup>7</sup> and which contain detailed regulations regarding the dress and consumption of the feudal lords and their retinues. We are therefore concerned here with the disciplining of the feudal aristocracy, a milieu that was fairly well defined, endowed with its own juridical status inherited from the Norman-Swabian period and, in particular, from the legislation of Frederick II. In this case sumptuary norms do not suppress distinctions, indeed, they presuppose them, while at the same time conferring a code upon them and imposing restrictions.

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<sup>6</sup> Francesco Testa, *Capitula Regni Siciliae*, I, Palermo 1741, pp. 88–98.

<sup>7</sup> “Comites, magnates, barones, milites habentes a curia certam provisionem” (or in another, more explicit phrasing, “*terram, provisionem, aut stipendia*”).

The first group of norms is based upon a different logic, typical of urban milieux, entailing the suppression of luxury, and especially in women. Since such a logic does not make provision for exemptions (given that the “aristocracy” is disciplined separately), when some exemptions do nonetheless emerge they indicate distinguishing criteria relating to the social body that have nothing to do with the traditional aristocratic lexicon and that only the cities are capable of generating. In other words, it is obvious that this group of norms had been conceived by the urban communities, which could well have negotiated them also. Upon closer scrutiny we find that the above regulations may be divided into three distinct clusters: one relating to male clothing (statutes 86–89), one relating to female adornment (statutes 90–97) and one relating to ceremonies (weddings, the dubbing of knights, funerals: statutes 98–104). Let us focus, for brevity’s sake, on the statute of most interest to us, the first. Statute 87 forbids anyone to wear “gilded spurs, and gilded reins, saddle and stirrups, unless he be a knight decorated with the chivalric *cingulum*”; however, “*doctores cuiuscumque professionis, iurisperiti et medici, praedicta, sicut milites, portare possint.*” These same categories are then said (in statute 88) to be at liberty to don the vair; *magni burgenses* and *mercatores*, however, may only wear it on the head.

We thus learn that some exemptions from the ban upon ostentatious displays of luxury in the city were provided for, and that they do not concern the seigneurial aristocracy. Various categories of person were interested in the considerable symbolic possibilities offered by decoration of horses and horsemen and in particular by special items of clothing such as the vair: the dubbed knights, of course, but also the *doctores cuiuscumque professionis*, the jurists, the doctors, the *magni burgenses et mercatores*. Moreover, some interesting information emerges with regard to the category that would seem to be the most prestigious, that of the *milites*.

This same source represents the *milites* as an ambiguous category: in accordance with the Swabian juridical tradition they constituted the lower segment of the feudal hierarchy (belonging to the sphere of “comites, magnates, barones, milites,” as we have seen) and were treated in the cluster of statutes relating to this latter, as privileged subjects. But they also belonged to the urban world, and here the attributes of the *miles* lost, in part, their exclusivity. In short, according to one group of norms (105–107), the *milites* display marks ostensibly placing them within the feudal hierarchy, while according to the other (86–104) they share with other subjects, extraneous to the sphere of feudality, a further set of distinguishing marks, such as the vair and the ornaments displayed when on horseback, but also

the restrictions imposed upon ostentation. For example, statute 86 forbids everyone to wear ornaments made of pearls, gold and silk.

It is thus apparent that there existed some privileged social categories peculiar to the urban milieu: this aristocracy seems, however, to have lacked clear-cut internal demarcations and to have included economically prominent groups (*magni burgenses, mercatores*), professionally qualified subjects, lawyers, notaries, bureaucrats. The hierarchical framework that emerges is elusive, and the *milites* formed part of it not as a separate segment but as a prestigious condition which eminent individuals *could* attain to, but which was not an obligatory goal.<sup>8</sup> Chivalric rites were open ceremonies. Indeed, statute 89 addresses “those who aspire to, and desire chivalric honour, whatever their estate or age may be”: these subjects may not don the vair, not even on their heads, they may not wear red footwear and they may not (as already laid down in statute 87) have, when riding, reins, stirrups and spurs decorated with gold (whereas someone not aspiring to the *militia* may wear the vair on their head).

The assumption of the *cingulum* would seem therefore to have offered an opportunity for social advancement. Indeed, a fair number of prosopographic profiles confirm that it was not unusual to see merchants, notaries and urban officials acquiring the *militia*.<sup>9</sup> But this advancement, which led neither to the forging of coherent identities, nor to the birth of “chivalric” dynasties, was always ambiguous.

In practice, the privileged status of the *milites* entailed only a small number of concrete advantages, in part fixed by law: the right, obviously, to bear arms, exemption from some taxes, such as the rare *collette* (that is the direct taxation),<sup>10</sup> and the exclusive entrusting to them, according to custom, of some prestigious offices, such as that of Praetor of Palermo. Yet the *milites* did not even monopolise the offices which were markedly military in content,<sup>11</sup> nor can we be certain that they were excluded from indirect taxation;<sup>12</sup> furthermore neither they nor the fief-holders had a

<sup>8</sup> Ennio Igor Mineo, *Nobiltà di stato. Famiglie e identità aristocratiche nel tardo medio-evo. La Sicilia* (Rome, 2001), pp. 179–84.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Statute 56 of Frederick III, Testa, *Capitula*, p. 75.

<sup>11</sup> In 1328 the captain and justiciar of Palermo was the judge Roberto de Laurencio, *ACFUP* 5, ed. Pietro Corrao (Palermo, 1986), p. 36.

<sup>12</sup> The taxation of the *milites* is taken for granted in a document from 1328: the officers of Palermo ask those of Corleone to respect the privilege of the citizens of Palermo and to exempt the *nobilis dominus* Giovanni de Cosmerio, *miles*, from being taxed on property owned within the territory of Corleone (*ACFUP* 5, pp. 38–40); but the privilege concerns Giovanni as *civis* and not as *miles*.

privileged tribunal of their own.<sup>13</sup> The ambiguous status of the *milites* therefore derives from the convergence, within one and the same notion, of a role—increasingly residual—deriving from the past, and of a current practice which rendered the *militia* an urban phenomenon, that is to say, a status to be acquired in the city, individual rather than dynastic, and compatible with other forms of influence.<sup>14</sup>

The other figures who occupied the upper echelons of Palermitan society, and who were permitted to use the relevant titles, came from the world of administration and of the legal professions. In Palermo, as in the other Sicilian cities, the holding of urban offices represented a sure path to social advancement: gradually, however, as the framework of the magistracies grew more complex, some proved to be more influential than others. What strikes us in fact, prior to the emergence of the role of jurats, is the uncontested prominence of the judges. They constituted the central organ of the *communitas*, the Praetorian court, and a distinction was in fact made between “*iuristi*” (that is to say, those with jurisprudential expertise) and *ydeoti* (lacking in this same professional status).<sup>15</sup> The judges, one and all, maintained their right, once they had issued a mandate, to be adorned with that title.<sup>16</sup> When, however, in 1332, they were, like the *milites*, exempted from the *collette*, the privilege was understood to be for life for the *iuristi* judges, but only for the period in office for the *ydeoti* judges.<sup>17</sup>

The sources make it plain that in any case the possession of juridical wisdom and expertise, even aside from the question of office-holding, brought prestige, distinction even. Indeed, all these categories—and the notaries must be numbered amongst them—were to be found, along with the *milites*, at the heart of the ceremonial sphere. In documents from the age of Frederick III references are sometimes made to the *luminaria* held on 15 August to celebrate the Assumption. On that occasion some categories of citizen would light their own candle: a document from 1329 refers explicitly to the *milites*, to the *iudices et licterati*, to the *notarii et scriptores*

<sup>13</sup> It is easy to find cases of *milites* and fief-holders being judged by the ordinary tribunal, the praetorian court. For some examples, see *ACFUP* 5, pp. 9–17, 35–37, 61–69, 180–182; *ACFUP* 8, ed. Cecilia Bilello and Anna Massa (Palermo, 1993), p. 143.

<sup>14</sup> See D'Alessandro, *Terra*, pp. 128–47.

<sup>15</sup> Beatrice Pasciuta, “In regia curia civiliter convenire,” *Giustizia e città nella Sicilia tardomedievale* (Turin, 2003), pp. 134–47.

<sup>16</sup> See D'Alessandro, *Terra*, pp. 134.

<sup>17</sup> Michele De Vio, *Felices et fidelissimae urbis panormitanae selecta aliquot privilegia* (henceforth *Privilegia*), (Palermo, 1706), p. 130; and see Pasciuta, *In regia curia*, p. 135.

*curie*.<sup>18</sup> On closer inspection we find that it is the public sphere of the *universitas* that is represented in this triple order: that of the *milites*, whose candles weighed twice as much as that of the judges, was indeed the most prestigious, but always within a context that sees it referred to the other social and professional milieus.

By way of conclusion, the public stage does indeed appear, in the first decades of the 14th century, to have been characterized by a marked degree of social informality. However, we can discern signs, in the “local” institutional sphere then under construction, of a process whereby in part new distinctions and roles were being produced. In saying that these roles were specifically urban and that they appeared to be neither strictly defined nor juridicized, my intention is to stress that they were individual roles which could be acquired, not dynastic ones ascribed to some private identity (which the sources do not draw attention to, and the institutional logic then taking shape does not allow for). Such roles were superimposed upon the traditional roles of the supralocal feudal and institutional world, whose meanings were thus in part changing. We cannot see this historical process close up: but the “internal” form of the city analysed here continued to cohabit with the “external” powers. Indeed, great weight was attached, and ever more visibly in the mid-14th century, to subordination to the powerful seigneurial families, and especially to the family that dominated urban space, the Chiaromonte, whose “nobility” appeared incommensurable with the prestige of the urban aristocracies, to which, however, many *milites* belonged.

## GUILDS

The document from 1329 does not directly describe the mid-August ceremony. Another document, however, which is much later (from 1385), contains a detailed list of the participants, and poses a problem that we cannot solve, given the fact that it makes almost no mention of the social categories which had featured in the earlier document. Yet the text from 1385 is important, because it describes the bearers of 58 candles lit for the Feast of the Assumption:<sup>19</sup> alongside those from, the royal court (even

<sup>18</sup> ACFUP 5, doc. 70, p. 128.

<sup>19</sup> Vincenzo Di Giovanni, *La topografia antica di Palermo dal secolo X al secolo XV*, I (Palermo, 1889), pp. 84–86. Cf. Salvatore Leone, “Lineamenti di una storia delle corporazioni in Sicilia nei secoli XIV–XVII”, *Archivio Storico Siciliano* 2 (1956), p. 89, n. 33.

when, bizarrely enough, the throne was empty) and the Archbishop, appear the candles of 44 professional categories and of the 5 quarters of the city. We do not know if this source is wholly reliable; nevertheless it does clarify the ceremonial function of the crafts and the quarters, which had never been so explicit before, and thereby helps us to orientate ourselves on the complex terrain of guild networks, and to understand the relationships of solidarity between members of the craft associations.

This time my starting-point is the customs of the city, which contain just one article dedicated explicitly to the crafts, number 77.<sup>20</sup> It is hard to date this article precisely, and all we can say for sure is that it is earlier than the end of the 14th century, given that it contains no reference to the guilds, which were active, as we shall see, at least from the 1410s.

The article states that the “*artifices omnes mechanicarum artium*,” whether *cives* or *exteri*, can practice “*eorum artificium*” and work “*libere absque alique servitute proinde Curie facienda*.” Mention is then made of barbers, bankers, and of *venditores rerum*, invariably confirming their freedom to practice. To this list are added the *pauperes mulieres* who may make bread without being obliged to pay taxes, “*quantumque turpem ac sordidam vitam ducant*.” Finally the blacksmiths are mentioned.

The picture that emerges from this source, and from various others, is fairly coherent. In the first place, between the 13th and 14th centuries the counterposing of vile and honoured activities did not have practical and institutional consequences (as it would once we are well into the 15th century). Secondly, we can clearly discern the full freedom of initiative available to individuals, be they *cives* or *exteri*, which was elsewhere a privilege of prestigious professional categories.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, the next article in the customs, number 78, confirms that there was a free trade regime which was incompatible with the presence of guilds vested with monopolistic privileges: “Let all the citizens of Palermo be allowed to weigh, sell and acquire cheese, meats, wool, hemp, cotton and any other commodity purchased wholesale . . . and not be required to pay anything to the Court.”<sup>22</sup> These words sanctioned complete freedom of trade, even in a strategic sector such as textile production. To quote a well-known example, when in 1322 the Genoese Alafrankino Gallo sought to embark upon the production of cloths he had to reckon not with the local guild organizations (there were

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<sup>20</sup> La Mantia, *Antiche consuetudini*, pp. 214–15.

<sup>21</sup> In article 68, for example, doctors' complete liberty to practice is attested (*ibid.*, p. 204).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 215; see also art. 75 on selling meat retail, *ibid.*, pp. 210ff.



none) but with the *Universitas* and with the king. The latter, by way of confirmation of what had been decided by the city's officials, decreed that: "Alafrankino, together with heirs and partners in perpetuity and other foreign workers, and the sons of these latter, practising the same crafts alongside him, [should] be free and exempt from any "*angaria* . . . , from royal and personal contributions, from all tolls, from *collette*, and from any other burdens."<sup>23</sup> It is evident that in the 14th century the regulation of professional and artisanal activities was at the bidding of officers elected on a territorial basis, and the king's intervention simply ratified the stance adopted within the *Universitas*. Thus, when the king, in 1330, endorsed a group of statutes referring to the office of catapan,<sup>24</sup> which some categories of artisan and merchant were supposed to abide by, there was not a single mention of guild associations. By the same token, article 61 of these same customs subordinated the activities of the *artifices* to the supervision of the catapans (or *maestri di piazza*).<sup>25</sup>

We cannot speak, in sum, of guilds of Palermo in the sense that such a term assumes in many mercantile cities in the Europe of this period, namely, organisational and jurisdictional independence, or the exercising of a monopoly over a specific activity. Admittedly, there is something reminiscent of acts of self-regulation in the reference, again in article 77, to a *statute* of barbers, smiths and blacksmiths. Yet only rarely do we come across any public trace of situations in which those plying the same trade coordinated their activities or displayed solidarity, since such situations pertain to a "private" sphere, consisting of the culture of work and of forms of territorial settlement which do not leave a lasting mark on the documentation.<sup>26</sup>

Other details, for example those relating to young mens' apprenticeship contracts, which never mention craft statutes,<sup>27</sup> serve to confirm this

<sup>23</sup> De Vio, *Privilegia*, pp. 82ff.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 114–24.

<sup>25</sup> La Mantia, *Antiche consuetudini*, p. 199.

<sup>26</sup> For example, we know something about the intense relationships between saddlers, see Elena Pezzini, *Halcia: un quartiere della città di Palermo nel primo Trecento*, Doctoral thesis in medieval history, Università degli studi di Palermo, IX ciclo (Palermo, 2000), pp. 293–98. The fact that in 1322 17 saddlers were exempted all at the same time from service in the night watch [*ACFUP* 6, ed. Laura Sciascia (Palermo, 1988), pp. 16–17] obviously had nothing at all to do with even an embryonic corporate structure (given that the exemptions were granted to individuals, and not to some association of theirs).

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Pietro Corrao, "L'apprendista nella bottega artigiana palermitana (secc. XIV–XVII)," in *I mestieri. Atti del II Congresso internazionale di studi antropologici siciliani (26–29 marzo 1980)* (Palermo, 1980), pp. 137–44.

judgement. By the same token, scholars have doubted the actual existence of monopolies over activities linked to trade and money-changing.<sup>28</sup>

It is not until the *ordo cereorum* of 1385 that we find any evidence for clearly distinct and publicly identifiable forms of corporate organization. As we have seen, in the list of 58 titulars of candles borne in procession, on 15 August, 44 of them represent particular artisanal and professional activities. Being isolated and differing from the earlier notices of the *luminaria* of the Assumption, such as that of 1329 (which makes no mention of artisans' candles),<sup>29</sup> the evidence from 1385 is hard to evaluate. The only plausible interpretation would be one that sets it within an open process of construction of corporate mechanisms. Yet it must have been a drawn-out process, whose nature we can only guess at. The Crafts listed in the *ordo* may have taken part in the ritual, but there is no evidence of their being granted any role in the political sphere.

Furthermore, the supposition that in the mid-14th century the formation of more formalized associative structures was an entirely open process is confirmed by the first explicit notices of the presence of lay confraternities, which appeared sporadically in the 1340s and then with slowly increasing frequency.<sup>30</sup>

It is therefore no coincidence if it was only at the end of the century that the presence of the confraternities appears to be regular, and that, in this same period, at the time of the Martinian restoration, the first signs appear not so much of the self-disciplining of the craft workers (which may perhaps have occurred earlier) as their complete incorporation into the public life of the city. In 1399 the city asked the king if the sugar-makers' consuls might be elected; later, in the 1410s, we come across other notices regarding artisan consulates,<sup>31</sup> and subsequently actual statutes such as those of the silversmiths, approved in 1447, whose importance lies in the fact that they confirm, a posteriori, the continuity of the ceremonial space attested by the *ordo* of 1385.<sup>32</sup> From then on the process

<sup>28</sup> Stephan R. Epstein, *An Island for itself. Economic development and social transformation in late medieval Sicily*, Past and Present Publications Series (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 197–199, 358–60.

<sup>29</sup> *ACFUP* 5, p. 128. There is a note referring to the *milites'* candle in 1335 also, see *ACFUP* 6, p. 116.

<sup>30</sup> See a list of statements in Vita Russo, *Il fenomeno confraternale a Palermo (secc. XIV–XV)* (Palermo, 2010), pp. 239–286.

<sup>31</sup> Henri Bresc, *Un monde méditerranéen. Economie et société en Sicile 1300–1450* (Rome–Palermo, 1986), I, p. 212 (table no. 29).

<sup>32</sup> Fabrizio Titone, "Il tumulto *popularis* del 1450. Conflitto politico e società urbana a Palermo," *Archivio storico italiano* 163 (2005), 56–58.

of institutionalization of a “general” guild system, representing the whole of the artisanal universe, advanced in fits and starts, being completed, probably, only after 1460.<sup>33</sup>

This does not mean that the artisans won full political competence. For example, they remained generally outside the local offices, although on one occasion, in 1448, the *Universitas*, or a part of it, regretted that the catapans’ role (increasingly entrusted to “homini comuni et ignorant”, namely, workers and artisans) had gone into decline,<sup>34</sup> and on another, in 1472, within an important corpus of statutes, it stipulated the exclusion of the guilds and of the artisans from the office of *ydeota* judge and, once again, from that of catapan.<sup>35</sup> Yet we certainly observe their presence at meetings of the city councils, at any rate from the 1440s.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, the *magistri* were protagonists, together with the highly variegated *populus*, in the various phases of the 1450 revolt.

Now, it was not by chance that in 1451, immediately after the ending of the revolt, Alfonso approved a statute whereby the representatives of the *Universitas* asked that consuls no longer be elected by the artisans. The latter, the petitioners objected, caused tension and conflict whenever they took on posts in government, because they were *persuni idioti et illece-terati* who often clashed with “His Majesty’s ordinary officials and those previously mentioned.”<sup>37</sup>

Of course the consuls did in fact go on being elected,<sup>38</sup> even if the episode of rioting was bound to disrupt the relationship between the nascent guilds and the city institutions. However, documents like this enable us to grasp that by now, generally speaking, the corporatization of labour was well advanced, and that it was not uncommon for local politics, by contrast with half a century earlier, to be more or less intensely affected by it; but also that it generated tensions which could be very acute, and in some cases, including that of Palermo, well documented.

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<sup>33</sup> Ferdinando Lioni, *Delle antiche maestranze palermitane*, Palermo 1883; Gabriella Lombardo, “Tra politica ed economia: le corporazioni di mestiere nella Sicilia moderna”, in Marco Meriggi and Alessandro Pastore, eds., *Le regole dei mestieri e delle professioni. Secoli XV, XIX* (Milan, 2000), pp. 326–45.

<sup>34</sup> De Vio, *Privilegia*, pp. 309 and cf. Titone, “Il tumulto,” pp. 63ff.

<sup>35</sup> De Vio, *Privilegia*, pp. 388ff.

<sup>36</sup> Titone, “Il tumulto,” p. 58, nota 40.

<sup>37</sup> Testa, *Capitula*, I, p. 367.

<sup>38</sup> For example, the consul “de li drapperi de li panni” in 1457, *ibid.*, p. 417.

## MERCHANTS, FOREIGNERS, CITIZENSHIP

There were no significant exceptions to this weakly corporate morphology: even the strongest professions still lacked a highly formalized and structured organization. We have seen, for instance, how the merchants appear not to have enjoyed a separate jurisdiction. Indeed, in 1338,<sup>39</sup> and then again a century later, in 1442, the *Universitas* was driven to ask the royal court to authorize a merchant tribunal presided over by the praetor “advised by two merchants . . . who shall be called consuls,” and if the parties should wish to appeal, “another two or three merchants” elected by jurats might intervene.<sup>40</sup>

The status of the merchants constitutes another crucial feature in the picture we are trying to compose here, not only on account of the influence commercial brokers brought to bear upon the social fabric of a great Mediterranean city, but also because reflecting upon their presence raises the more general theme of foreigners; indeed, from the foundation of the Norman kingdom many of the merchants active in Palermo, as in other cities in the South of Italy, in fact came from distant cities, both Italian and beyond the Alps.

What particularly concerns us is the relationship between this type of immigration and urban society, and what precisely such a relationship reveals to us about this latter. About the merchants whom the sources describe as *exteri* or *foresterii* we are especially interested in the meaning of their displacement overseas and of their dynamics of settlement (and not in that of their circulation around the routes of international trade). Their mobility had multiple causes, and the “macropolitical” ones (for example, Sicily’s transfer after the Vespers into the Ghibelline-Aragonese camp), though important, ought not to be overestimated. The same applies to “macroeconomic” factors. In other words, we cannot suppose that brokers’ choices formed part, in the ordinary course of things, of a coherent plan of functional relationships between economic regions or between actual states. More realistically the merchants’ presence in the South facilitated its integration into supra-regional markets, and made possible a more effective exploitation of the resources a kingdom such as the Sicilian could lay aside, that is agricultural products for which the

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<sup>39</sup> De Vio, *Privilegia*, p. 216.

<sup>40</sup> Savagnone, “Capitoli inediti della città di Palermo”, *Archivio storico siciliano* n.s., 26 (1901), pp. 107–108. The king, Alfonso the Magnanimous, would in part approve subordinating the actions of merchants to the authority of the judge of the first appeals.

demand (except perhaps in the latter half of the 14th century) regularly exceeded the supply.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, that presence was also a response to a comprehensive call for technical competences and skilled labour voiced by southern society, in the sector of exchanges and of an already financialized economy, likewise in the sector of bureaucratic or financial and book-keeping competences,<sup>42</sup> and, lastly, in that of artisanal and manufacturing activities. In short, one of our points of departure in analysing this presence is the fact that the Sicilian economy, early integrated into the Mediterranean market, was not harmed by the activity of foreign brokers. The other is the sheer complexity of the social spectrum of immigration.

I would moreover stress that the causes for the merchants' displacement are better understood through specific individual strategies (both of individuals and of collective subjects such as families, commercial partnerships etc.) rather than in terms of the "penetration" achieved by an undifferentiated community, Genoese or Pisan, which might be thought to represent the rational interests of the mother country. On the contrary, it was the Sicilian state, that is the Crown, that might have an interest in availing itself of the financial acumen, the technical abilities and the name of many brokers active at an international level. By the same token, it was the state which, in its relationships with technicians and financiers prepared to be mobile, could filter and give a direction to foreign settlements, encouraging or discouraging them as the case might be, and not always applying the logic of a grand international policy.<sup>43</sup>

Granted these premises, and reverting again to Palermo, it is readily apparent how, especially at the beginning of the period that concerns us here, the presence in considerable numbers of foreign merchants would seem to tally with the weak institutional structuring of the Sicilian cities and the fragile identity of its ruling groups, characteristics which made of them more open and cosmopolitan places. We have already seen how the customs guaranteed complete liberty of economic initiative to the *exteri* also. This freedom of movement found expression in the monopolising of some sectors of the local market, but not in the propensity to maintain (or to construct) an identity that was separate from the local urban

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<sup>41</sup> Epstein, *An Island to Itself*, pp. 284–286.

<sup>42</sup> Mario Del Treppo, "Stranieri nel regno di Napoli. Le élites finanziarie e la strutturazione dello spazio economico e politico," in Gabriella Rossetti, ed., *Dentro la città Stranieri e realtà urbane nell'Europa dei secoli XII–XVI* (Naples, 1989), pp. 181–184.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 197, Giuseppe Petralia, "I toscani nel Mezzogiorno medievale. Genesi ed evoluzione trecentesca di una relazione di lungo periodo", in Sergio Gensini, ed., *La Toscana nel secolo XIV. Caratteri di una civiltà regionale* (Pacini, 1988), pp. 287–336.

context, that is to say, the identity of those belonging to a foreign *nation*. We should then linger over one of the fundamental aspects of this freedom, that is, the minimal difficulty, for a large part of the period we are concerned with, of acceding to citizenship, all the more significant when, as was the case here, the theatre of operations was a great city. In mercantile centres, such as Palermo, Trapani and Messina, the high degree of receptivity was thus matched by a far from rigid model of citizenship. Indeed, this model rendered it a simple matter to obtain citizenship, and, in principle, did not exclude multi-citizenship.<sup>44</sup> On several occasions, in the course of the 14th century, the city negotiated with the king over how to discipline citizenship: first of all in 1305, Frederick III confirmed certain privileges granted the city by his predecessors, and extended to Palermo concessions formerly granted to Messina;<sup>45</sup> then, in 1335 Peter II, and in 1346 Louis ratified these dispensations, clarifying some controversial aspects relating precisely to the relative ease of obtaining the *civilitas*.<sup>46</sup>

In describing with great precision which subjects enjoyed *immunitates* and *libertates*, the privilege of 1305 thus tells us just what it meant in Palermo to be a *civis*. The condition of *civis* referred to those who were natives of the city (*oriundi*) and lived there; to those who came from outside (*exteri*) and married a woman who was *oriunda*, or to those who moved to the city with wives who were not *oriunde* with *animo habitandi et morandi* and who remained for the space of one year, one month, one week and one day; to widows who were *exteri* but who continued to dwell in the city, provided that they did not remarry elsewhere. The attribute of *civis* was thus somewhat changeable, easily acquired but as easily lost. Those *cives*, even if *oriundi* (as specified), who did not have any family and intended to live elsewhere, forfeited their enjoyment of the *immunitates* and *libertates* inherent in citizenship.

The statutes approved by Peter II in 1335 confirmed the above dispensation, and furnished some additional particulars. First of all, they confirmed that it was the *universitas* that granted *civilitas*,<sup>47</sup> and that what

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<sup>44</sup> Even if of course the picture is very variable and changes with the passage of time: Del Treppo, "Stranieri", pp. 225–27, Andrea Romano, "La condizione giuridica di stranieri e mercanti in Sicilia nei secoli XIV–XV," in Mario Del Treppo, ed., *Sistema di rapporti ed élites economiche in Europa (secoli XII–XVII)* (Naples, 1984), pp. 113–32, in particular, pp. 128–31.

<sup>45</sup> De Vio, *Privilegia*, pp. 37ff.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 140, 176–78.

<sup>47</sup> Which does not rule out the possibility of the crown having granted citizenship as a privilege, see Henri Bresc, "L'étranger privilégié dans les politiques municipales: Palerme (1311–1410) et Draguignan (1370–1440)," in Claudia Moatti and Wolfgang Kaiser, eds., *Gens*

was involved was not the conferring of an irrevocable quality. This is evident, for example, in the case of the *exteri* considered “ut panhormitani cives,” who in time of war had abandoned their houses and returned to the places whence they came, and who therefore had not only renounced privileges but also had shirked “velut ingrati” the burdens that membership of the community imposed upon them: their citizenship should be revoked, along with their prerogatives and they, once again, “velut exteri haberi debeant et tractari.”<sup>48</sup> Suppose we compare the norm with one of the many routine certifications issued on 6 March 1312 to one Orlando Biricterio. Orlando was an *oriundus*; “for some time now he has been and is a Palermitan citizen, having in this same city, a wife, moveable and immoveable property, and his own residence, he has participated in the burdens and obligations of the city *ut civis cum civibus urbis ipsius*.”<sup>49</sup> We thus grasp the key point: the condition of being welcomed as a foreigner is, together with an uninterrupted stay and family ties, an effective commitment to sustaining the burdens of the community (*in primis* paying the relevant taxes), and therefore not being an encumbrance. In Sicily, as elsewhere, this latter was a recurrent criterion invoked in order to recognise who was an integral part of a community. In Palermo too the city belonged to those who lived there, and citizenship was above all a relationship; the notion of *oriundus* was itself relative, serving to pin down the meaningful relationship between recent immigrants and long-term inhabitants. Therefore, just as the city was not a community rooted in the past—memory of which, not by chance, was not preserved—so too citizenship was not a sign of membership in that imaginary community, in the community of the ancestors.

It is thus obvious that this open model of citizenship fostered mobility and the taking root of those not born in Palermo, and that, conversely, it posed no obstacle to those who came to do business or to lend their services while maintaining links with their place of origin. This is why, in analysing local society, it is preferable to concentrate more on individual trajectories, on the concrete articulation of kinship networks and of contacts, either for business or not, between individuals and nuclei of brokers, than on the putative (and hard to document) strategies adopted

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*de passage en Méditerranée de l'Antiquité à l'époque moderne. Procédure de contrôle et d'identification* (Paris, 2007), p. 215.

<sup>48</sup> De Vio, *Privilegia*, p. 141.

<sup>49</sup> *ACFUP* 1, eds. Fedele Pollaci Nuccio and Domenico Gnoffo (Palermo, 1892; anastatic reprint 1982), p. 56.

by specific communities. The study of individual trajectories suggests that foreign merchants frequently opted for prolonged immersion in the host city, invested in immovable property and land, sometimes marrying or even dying there, and yet they nonetheless might still maintain close or intense links with those who had undergone similar experiences. It may therefore be no accident that so few traces of the community life of the *nations* remain. We know of lodges and consulates, but nothing, or virtually nothing, about their functioning as institutions.<sup>50</sup>

A case that has been much studied, that of the Tuscans, confirms the above analysis. There had long been a Tuscan presence in the South, and the Ligurians, too, had long been on the move;<sup>51</sup> in either case we have good cause to go as far back as the Norman period. The Tuscans, however, began to arrive in far larger numbers, readily perceptible from the end of the 13th century. What is striking here is the limited solidarity evinced by those who moved to Sicily, and their readiness first to extend their stay and then to settle, and to take on a role in local public space. Between the last decades of the 13th century and the first half of the 14th century there thus emerged, alongside the great merchants linked more or less directly to the crown, a host of middling and small actors who only in some cases acted on behalf of companies operating on the international market. Such actors came not only from the great cities, such as Pisa, Florence, Lucca or Siena, but also from many minor centres, and often we encounter them not only in Palermo, and in other major trading centres such as Messina and Trapani, but also in communities inland, and involved in traffic of a local nature.

In these latter circumstances it is hard to recover the origin of the individuals and the defining features of an important community interaction that went beyond solidarity between relatives and correspondents. In this emigration those who were rapidly assimilated exerted a great deal of influence, thereby reinforcing the “Latin” cultural tone of the ancient Islamic island and its capital. In order to comprehend such a long-term

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<sup>50</sup> Bresc, *Un monde*, I, pp. 380–90 (and Table 78).

<sup>51</sup> On the Tuscans in Sicily see Giuseppe Petralia, *Banchieri e famiglie mercantili nel Mediterraneo aragonese. L'emigrazione dei pisani in Sicilia nel Quattrocento* (Pisa, 1989), Id., “Sui Toscani in Sicilia tra Due e Trecento: la penetrazione sociale e il radicamento nei ceti urbani,” in Marco Tangheroni, ed., *Commercio, finanza, ragione pubblica. Stranieri e realtà urbane in Sicilia e Sardegna nei secoli XII–XV* (Naples, 1989), pp. 129–218; on the Genoese, and on the presence of other merchant communities in Sicily, see in general Pietro Corrao, “Mercanti stranieri e regno di Sicilia: sistema di protezioni e modalità di radicamento nella società cittadina,” in *Sistema di rapporti*, pp. 87–112.



phenomenon, the link between mobility and a shift in identity should be stressed. This link found expression in concrete opportunities for those who took up the challenge of travelling to Sicily, and for those who, in Tuscany, kept in touch with relatives and correspondents who were active in Sicily and whose return could not be taken for granted.

Integration into urban society, and likewise into the milieu of its ruling groups, therefore did not necessarily require extended stays.<sup>52</sup> To give just one example, in 1335 the confirmation of citizenship issued to the *providus vir* Puccio Iacobi, a prominent merchant and on several occasions a city official, probably in Palermo since the immediate aftermath of the Vespers, defines him as “one of the most honoured and best citizens of the city, who, together, with his fellow citizens, took upon himself its honours and its burdens.”<sup>53</sup>

The dynamics of integration were very diverse. There was no clash between naturalisation and the tendency of Palermitans who were of Tuscan origin to cluster together. Indeed, the one inclination (the propensity to live in close proximity) probably facilitated the other. The majority of such Tuscans, and the Pisans in particular, thus lived in the quarter known as the Kalsa, and also in the one next to Porta Patitelli, where, alongside the other nations’ lodges, the lodge of the Pisans was to be found.<sup>54</sup> Nor is it an accident that the fulcrum of Tuscan commercial activity lay between San Francesco, the *ruga Pissarum*, Porta Polizzi and the port.

As for the Pisans, they were invariably a prominent part of the Tuscan emigration. Their community did, however, acquire particular characteristics from the early 15th century, after Florence’s conquest of Pisa, in 1406, and the Mediterranean diaspora of a notable part of the city’s ruling group. The lasting propensity of Pisans to head for Palermo and Sicily demonstrates, as we have seen, that it is not only a traumatic event (such as the end of political independence in the mother country) that will account for a tendency to emigrate and to switch citizenship. There is no doubting the fact, however, that it had become easier to settle permanently, and that it sometimes seemed to be obligatory, especially for the elites. Indeed, after 1406, this choice was chiefly made by a socially prominent segment and therefore more easily identifiable in identity terms, being composed of subjects involved in banking and in large-scale trade. For this reason

<sup>52</sup> Petralia, “Sui Toscani”, pp. 215–218, Pezzini, *Halcia*, pp. 238ff.

<sup>53</sup> *ACFUP* 6, p. 112 (doc. 61). For the origin of Puccio and his offices, see Petralia, “Sui Toscani,” pp. 142ff. and note 42, 215ff.

<sup>54</sup> Pezzini, *Halcia*, pp. 232–276.

the ultimate outcome is all the more striking, since in so many cases it entailed complete incorporation into the ranks of the Sicilian—and, in particular, the Palermitan—aristocracy, an outcome that was reinforced in the latter half of the 15th century.<sup>55</sup>

One may therefore readily understand just how difficult it is to discern the physiognomy of the community life of the mercantile “nations” in Sicily. The presence of the Pisans, for example, shows how the variable intensity of professional, familial and clientelistic relationships inside the world of those originally from Pisa was not matched by a clearly defined institutional organization, in the guise of a consulate and of jurisdictional autonomy, nor by the collective patronage of a place of worship. Indeed, the most heavily represented “nations,” those of the Tuscan cities, did not have a consulate, whereas the Catalans did, even though the Catalan nation was not much given to settling in Palermo.<sup>56</sup> As we have already observed, the main foreign settlements, in Palermo as in Messina, tended to exist as homogeneous urban segments, and to occupy continuous tracts of land, yet these solidarities did not lead to the construction of a distinct space with lodges and warehouses. Scholars have noted how in Palermo the boundaries between the different groups tended in practice to become blurred, and how, notwithstanding the (sporadic) presence of sacred spaces attributed to the various communities (churches, confraternities, chapels), S. Francesco became, by the 14th century, the church of the entire urban ruling class, “foreign” merchants included.<sup>57</sup>

#### HIERARCHIZATION AND ARISTOCRATIZATION

Let us now make a leap forward in time. Around 1450 Palermitan society had different characteristics to those we have brought to the fore so far. In that year a revolt erupted, the causes of which were as much economic as political, since grave scarcities in grain supplies converged with the demand for different, broader forms of political representation.<sup>58</sup> The entire citizenry became involved in the revolt, and the sources relating to this episode reveal a mode of classifying the city’s inhabitants which in the 14th century had not yet been mature. This mode involved a mechanism

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<sup>55</sup> Petralia, *Banchieri*, pp. 351–360.

<sup>56</sup> Corrao, “Mercanti stranieri,” pp. 94, 107.

<sup>57</sup> Bresc, *Un monde*, 1, p. 392; likewise Corrao, “Mercanti stranieri,” p. 105.

<sup>58</sup> Titone, “Il tumulto.”

of self-representation based upon the division of the social body into four distinct segments, namely, the gentlemen (*gentilomini*), the merchants (*mercatores*), the *borgesi* and the artisans (*magistri*). The meaning of these labels is in no way explicit. We are not concerned here with juridical distinctions or with an estate hierarchy, as could already happen in other European cities, but, generally speaking, with distinctions within the part of the population that was able to act in the arena of urban institutions. To put it briefly, *gentilomini* refers to the upper segment of the social scale, and comprises big landowners, big entrepreneurs (such as those involved in the nascent sugar industry): that is to say the highly diverse milieu of those who consistently acceded to the urban offices and who campaigned for the introduction of an oligarchical criterion governing the electoral mechanisms. The *borgesi* were above all small and middling landowners, in the main of properties termed *burgensaticii*, that is to say, estates juridically distinct from the feudal ones. *Mercatores* were probably equated in these sources with “big merchants,” involved in the regional and supraregional trade networks, in loans and contracts for public works. *Magistri* (who were the equivalent of the *artisti* or the *ministrali* of other cities) were first and foremost artisans and professionals organized into guilds. Broadly speaking, in this period we may say that the city council, although no rule expressly stated as much, was composed of the above groups, or, in other words, as we have seen, of those who were able to contribute to taxation. Separated off in some fashion, or so it would seem, was the *popolo*, a fluid category also including salaried labourers and small artisans, whose physiognomy appears entirely in a “negative” form, since it refers to those labourers who cannot be listed among the *magistri* and who are not “habili” for a contribution.<sup>59</sup>

The above classificatory scheme is encountered throughout Sicily.<sup>60</sup> The communities, large and small, in the royal demesne thus employed the same institutional language, that is to say, a shared nucleus of rules and of mechanisms, within a highly visible context of communication and of imitation. But the local use of these terms is highly nuanced, and this reveals the great variety of social contexts or of factional roles to which they alluded. For example, in many cities, the *popolo* had a place in the formal arena of political competition; in Palermo, however, it was excluded from it (at any rate after the uprising of 1450, in which it had been a

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., pp. 50–61.

<sup>60</sup> Epstein, *An Island to Itself*, pp. 357–366; Titone, *Governments*, pp. 175–80.

protagonist). And there is still no doubt that the social profile of the powerful Palermitan gentlemen can hardly be made to correspond with the far less powerful groups we find elsewhere, with the same term being used (or that of *curiali*), at the summit of the local hierarchy.

We are thus concerned with a stereotyped vocabulary which serves to mask local differences and reflects the tendency of political and administrative language to represent in a simplified guise the complex realities of the demesne space: the designated groups are not (and will not become) juridically delimited spheres, and not all the designations have the same descriptive efficacy. For example, whereas “magistri” implies the presence of guilds in the public arena, “gentilomini” or “borgesi” are still vague expressions.

By spelling out the forms assumed by such differences, we are also able to discern a new hierarchical logic: it is plain that the revolt of 1450 served to emphasise the separation between an aristocracy represented in the first place (but not solely) by the gentlemen and the rest of society. Yet the process was complex, as a threefold statement can elucidate. It was complex, first of all, in the eyes of contemporaries, who, lacking reliable classificatory grids, were attempting to equip themselves with compasses (the abovementioned designations), which historians then stumble upon. Secondly, the process was complex on account of the temporal stratification of the changes that had occurred. In other words, we must distinguish between, on the one hand, a dynamic pertaining to the *longue durée*, which started at the end of the 13th century, and, on the other, a discontinuity introduced in 1392 when royal authority was restored. It is this latter which in all probability precludes our backdating the schema under review. If, in other words, we go backwards, to the end of the 14th century, or a little further, this schema seems invisible, and its use proves to be concretely impossible. After four decades of seigneurial hegemony the restoration imparted new life to the self-government of the communities within the demesne, and a resumption of the structuring of the local political space and its actors. For example, it was with the advent of the Martins, and not before, that the representatives of the demesne cities were called upon to participate in genuine parliamentary assemblies.

Finally, the third reason for the complexity of the process may be phrased as follows: the tendency we encounter in Palermo for social differences to be defined forms part of a more general phenomenon, common to the whole kingdom, to its cities, great and small, but also to the regional political society, divided between the court, the central offices and the management of the great fiefs. The quadripartite map with which

we started simplifies the local roles but it is not the result of an abstract or scholastic reading of society; rather, it is a *direct* implication of a general political shift, that is to say, the need to define in some way the faces of the collective actors present on the various political stages.<sup>61</sup>

The biographical plane does not really correspond to these representations. If we restrict ourselves to the segment that has been most closely studied, that of the dominant groups, it confirms something that we already know, namely, the complex profile of the individuals and of their families. It is probable that individuals assume multiple signs of recognition, that their identities are composite, and that they therefore act at one and the same time on the plane of economic initiative (merchants, bankers, great agricultural entrepreneurs etc.), on that of political and administrative activity (as city officials or officials in the central offices), and on that of managing prestigious resources (such as the fiefs) granted to them by the crown.<sup>62</sup> There is therefore not yet an exclusive index of belonging to the "nobility" (there is not, for example, a list of privileged families, as may occur elsewhere); and in this regard the rank of *miles* continues to be open, in some way implicit in any experience whatsoever of social advancement, but also, precisely because implicit, rendered banal, as a marker *ex post facto* of an authority already acquired in practice.

Confirming that the aristocratic sphere was an open one does, however, not mean that the actors did not seek to identify a boundary, within a more general tendency to recognise more or less new distinctions. The major distinctions, the ones that divide the whole social body, are more effective if they are accompanied by others which identify factions or families. In the 15th century the signs of the dynastic structuration of families are far more obvious than before, and the programmes for safeguarding not only an inheritance but also the identity and memory (often recent) of the lineage appear more precise.<sup>63</sup>

By the same token, it is now easier to discern in the city the actions of opposed factions, in some cases clearly composed of families. A particularly telling example is the enmity in the 1420s between the faction headed by the Crispo, a group of bureaucrats and fief-holders originally

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<sup>61</sup> Mineo, *Nobiltà*, pp. 184–291.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Vincenzo D'Alessandro, "Per una storia della società siciliana alla fine del Medioevo: feudatari, patrizi, borghesi," *Archivio storico per la Sicilia orientale* 77 (1981), 193–208; numerous profiles may be found in Tripoli, *Amministrazione cittadina*, pp. 167–222.

<sup>63</sup> Mineo, *Nobiltà*, VII cap.

from Messina, and that led by the Bononia, another family recently risen to prominence. The peace of 1425 allows us a glimpse of how the factions were constituted: members of the two families alongside particular individuals (in some cases linked by marriage) and whole kinship groups, such as the Valguarnera (*omnibus de Valguarnerio*) allied to the Crispo.<sup>64</sup>

Other macroscopic signs of the tendency for new cleavages to occur, and of the aristocratization of the upper segment, are already familiar to us: the emergence of guild solidarities within the crafts is one of the most significant, indeed, it bears out the supposition that the process in question affects the whole society. But public recognition of the crafts was somewhat slow in coming, as we have already noted. When we see political space becoming structured as a space of competition between parts, the definite presence of artisans appears to be only intermittent. The city council is the site that reveals the new actors and their relative consistency.<sup>65</sup> It is in fact an agency without a completely formal existence but with full decision-making powers, and which also sees the participation, from the early 15th century, of subjects not drawn from the composite aristocracy we discussed above. In an assembly of 1406 “nobili, iudichi legisti et altri burgisi chitatini honorati” took part; at another, held in 1416, there were “nobili homini et homini comuni.”<sup>66</sup> In 1442, when the rectors of the new Hospital were to be elected, the officers of the *Universitas* followed roughly the same logic: the choice fell on one representative of the “gentlemen,” one of the merchants and one of the *borgesi*.<sup>67</sup> Only when the conflict intensified did the artisans become visible, as in the phases preceding the revolt of 1450, when on some occasions their participation in the council is well documented.<sup>68</sup> The presence of the Crafts in the public arena was therefore a possibility but was still very weak and, in some significant circumstances, confirmed more through the polemical response to it than in any other way.

It is not easy to explain why the social structure of Palermo, like that of many Sicilian cities, was represented in the age of Martin and then, above all, in that of Alfonso, in a somewhat more structured fashion than

<sup>64</sup> Tripoli, *Amministrazione cittadina*, pp. 172–79, and in particular pp. 173ff.

<sup>65</sup> On the councils see above all Fabrizio Titone, “Istituzioni e società urbane in Sicilia, 1392–1409”, *Società e storia* 105 (2004), pp. 480–86; for Palermo in particular, Tripoli, *Amministrazione cittadina*, pp. 123–36 and Titone, “Il tumulto.”

<sup>66</sup> Tripoli, *Amministrazione cittadina*, p. 136.

<sup>67</sup> Titone, “Il tumulto,” p. 53 and note 27.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58 for an account of a council of 1449.

had been the case in the previous century. For brevity's sake I will limit myself here to two causes. The first is already well-known to us; indeed, it is one of the guiding threads running through this essay. The reference is, once again, to the expansion of the sphere of city self-government, and therefore to the institutional weight of the urban magistracies; the greater this weight became, the more concern was shown, as much by potentially interested subjects as by the crown, in defining the rules of access and the formal composition of the institutions in question. The second cause, closely linked to the first, reminds us that the Kingdom's resources chiefly derive from here, from the cities, where a good proportion, and certainly the economically most dynamic part, of the Kingdom's population lived. The clarification of the city's social structure is then also a consequence of fiscal policies, which were harsher, relatively speaking, under Alfonso the Magnanimous, and which forced the communities to produce, either by consensus or through conflict, more definite criteria for dividing up the tax burden.<sup>69</sup>

If we look now at three series of statutes approved in different years, we find some reference to many of the themes touched upon so far, and this should make it easier for us to identify a general schema for the processes of corporatization and construction of collective identities.

The first two series, approved by Alfonso the Magnanimous in 1448 and 1451,<sup>70</sup> provide a snapshot of the situation on the eve of, and at the conclusion of the revolt of 1450. The theme they share is that of access to local offices, which was now more rigidly disciplined, even through a novel use of the notion of citizenship, which, as we have seen, was traditionally highly flexible. In 1448 it was reasserted that "foreign persons," who were not legitimate citizens and who had not lived for a specified period of time in the city, could not become officials of the *Universitas*. Three years later, however, distinctions were proposed between different sorts of citizen. No foreigner, it was now written, could hold an office "unless he is a legitimate and native citizen, by birth or else through having married a Palermitan woman, or through a privilege, although having received it he has to have lived in the aforementioned city for five years running." With regard to already entrenched rules the criterion of a period of residence

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<sup>69</sup> The most convincing analysis is in Epstein, *An Island to Itself*, pp. 353–374, 390–397; Id., "Conflitti redistributivi, fisco e strutture sociali (1392–1516)", in Francesco Benigno and Claudio Torrì, eds., *Élites e potere in Sicilia dal medioevo a oggi* (Catanzaro-Rome, 1995), pp. 31–45.

<sup>70</sup> De Vio, *Privilegia*, pp. 306–324.

of five years had introduced—perhaps originally in 1421<sup>71</sup>—an important novelty, which would then be confirmed in 1460<sup>72</sup>, bearing witness to the consolidation of the influence of the urban magistracies.

It was then decided that the catapans or *maestri di piazza* should be “eminent and sober citizens, men of authority, and opulent” (*notabili chitadini, gravi e di grandi auctoritate et opulenti*), and not “men who were common, and ignorant of the usages and customs.” This confirms the fact that access to the magistracies was broadened in the age of Alfonso, and that it was possible for exponents from the world of the small merchants and the artisans to participate in some of them, at any rate in those (such as the *maestri di piazza* or catapans) where matters of concern to them were addressed; but they also state that this broadening led to heightened tensions, which would lead to the uprising of 1450.

This latter left its mark on another series of statutes, dating from 1451. Here we see the *Universitas* asking the King not to instigate proceedings against all those who, directly or indirectly, had taken part in the revolt. It therefore offered its assurance “that the most eminent men (*princhipali*), both officers and gentlemen and many other citizens and *borgesi*, who ordinarily make up and represent the *universitas*, did not take part in the recent uprising and had not assented to it.” What is significant here is the explication of the idea that the duty of representing the *universitas* is entrusted to the “*principali homini*,” a category restricted to city officials, gentlemen and *borgesi*. Not only were the artisans not included but, as we have already seen, a brutal attempt was made in the immediate aftermath of the revolt to exclude them from offices.

Twenty years later, the statutes approved by John II in 1472<sup>73</sup> offer an analytic picture of the changes that had occurred in the course of the preceding decades, giving the impression of an adjustment to the operational logic of local politics.

The city asked<sup>74</sup> that all officials be elected, as tradition dictated, “*per scarfias*,” that is, by the drawing of lots once a list had been compiled of those who were eligible (the scrutiny). It is important to emphasise that the King’s reply was not encouraging, and that the viceroy was asked from then on to make a choice from amongst those whose names were on the ballot, as if to confirm the importance that the magistracies had assumed

<sup>71</sup> ASP, *Protonotaro*, 24, ff. 501v–508v (in Tripoli, *Amministrazione cittadina*, p. 27).

<sup>72</sup> De Vio, *Privilegia*, p. 346.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 382–391.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 386–388.



in the political balances of the Kingdom.<sup>75</sup> The administrative sphere considered as a whole had expanded somewhat, and there were three times as many officials as there had been in the early 14th century. The flow-chart now presupposed the following officers: the Praetor; 6 *juristi* judges (3 of them for the capitania court and 3 for the appellate court); 6 *idioti* judges; 12 jurats; 12 *maestri di piazza*; 12 *maestri di scurta* (night policemen); 6 master notaries of the capitania court; 3 master notaries of the appellate court; 4 treasurers. Government personnel now numbered close on 60, whereas, by way of contrast, in the 1320s there were only 20 or so elected officials (in a city that then had twice as many inhabitants).

Given this composition, access to the above offices was now regulated in a socially more defined manner. Family membership really started to count<sup>76</sup>: father and son could not enter the same ballot, nor could two brothers (though the King would amend this, specifying that a father and son, or two brothers, could enter the same ballot but not serve as officers in the same year). The public role of the crafts had been recognized once and for all, and clearly delimited; at the same time, a polarisation between honourable and “vile” crafts emerges, and consequently the stance evident in the old article 77 of the customs was definitively superceded: ruffians, inn-keepers, butchers “et altri vili et dejecti persuni” could no longer stand for office as *maestro di scurta*.<sup>77</sup> Above all, neither “mekanichi ne artisti” could be considered for the office of *idioti* judge or *maestro di piazza*, since such offices were the exclusive preserve of gentlemen, lawyers “and honourable citizens.”<sup>78</sup> The field of pre-eminence and its boundaries were thus settled; guilds and artisans may not have been cut off from political society but they certainly were excluded from the most important offices. One of the aspects of the complex aristocratic dimension of Palermo now coincided not with the administration as such of the city but with its upper segment.

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<sup>75</sup> See Valentina Vigiano, *L'esercizio della politica. La città di Palermo nel Cinquecento* (Rome, 2004), pp. 115ff.

<sup>76</sup> De Vio, *Privilegia*, p. 388.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 388.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 389.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this same span of years, extending from the death of Alfonso the Magnanimous, in 1458, to the statutes of 1472, the face of the city was changing. Some urbanistic interventions conferred new signs of recognition upon it and sanctioned the shifting of its epicentre northwards and towards the sea. Under this heading one might include the rebuilding, at the instigation of the praetor Pietro Speciale, of the praetorian palace, the political heart of the *Universitas*; the building of the new Archbishop's Palace with the complete reconstruction of the area around the Cathedral (and thus the creation of the largest square in all Palermo); and, finally, the creation "de lu planu de la Marina" opposite the Steri, the new and towering symbol of royal power.<sup>79</sup>

There were in this very same period new developments in the sphere of representation and memory. We have cause to refer once again here to the praetor Pietro Speciale, who, between 1469 and 1470, ordained that all the city's laws be collected and recorded in two magnificent illuminated codices.<sup>80</sup> The following year, the Dominican and humanist Pietro Ranzano decided to publish separately, and in the vulgar tongue, a section from Book XXIX of his *Annales omnium temporum*, in other words, the pages he had dedicated to Palermo, entitled *De autore, primordii et progressu felicis urbis Panhormi*.<sup>81</sup>

We know that up until then the city had not had an official memoir: not since the days of Ibn Ḥawqal, or the Epistle of the pseudo-Falcando, and therefore not since the 12th century, had Palermo been so lovingly described and idealised.<sup>82</sup> There was therefore something absolutely original about the work of Ranzano, himself a native of Palermo. It was no accident that he chose to begin with the acknowledgement of this void, which Ranzano endeavoured to fill. As it turned out, however, the Palermitan

<sup>79</sup> Henri Bresc, "L'espace publique à Palerme (1100–1460)," in Jacques Heers, ed., *Fortifications, portes de villes, places publiques, dans le monde méditerranéen* (Paris, 1985), pp. 41–58, Vincenzo D'Alessandro, "Palermo aragonese," in *Storia di Palermo*, IV, *Dal Vespro a Ferdinando il Cattolico* (Palermo, 2008), pp. 118–125.

<sup>80</sup> The codex of the privileges is kept in the Biblioteca comunale di Palermo (Qq H 125); that of the customs is in Cambridge University Library, see Paul Binski and Patrick Zutshi, eds., *Western Illuminated Manuscripts, A Catalogue of the Collection in Cambridge University Library* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 431ff.

<sup>81</sup> Pietro Ranzano, *Delle origini e vicende di Palermo*, ed. Gioacchino Di Marzo (Palermo, 1864); cfr. Marzia Privitera, "Lotta politica e storiografia nella Sicilia di Giovanni II: Pietro Ranzano e l'opuscolo sulle origini di Palermo (1470–71)," *Clio* 32 (1996), 437–77.

<sup>82</sup> Pezzini, "Articolazioni territoriali," p. 734, n. 16.

humanist simply produced a rapid sketch chiefly concerned with the remote past, and with the distant, that is Phoenician, origins of the city, up until the Roman period. His account then swiftly traversed the Muslim conquest (a few lines), the Norman reconquest, and the dynastic arc of the titulars of the royal crown from Roger II to Manfred. At this point Ranzano's narrative broke off (though there is a reference to the circuit of walls planned by Manfred III Chiaromonte).

Two aspects are brought out in Ranzano's discourse about Palermo. First of all, the city's remote origins serve to root the autonomy of the Palermitan *popolo* in a free zone, but its meaning becomes more precise during the centuries marked by the predominance of republican Rome. There thus emerges the image of a "city confederated rather than subdued,"<sup>83</sup> together with the predictable Roman origins of the office of Praetor, an office of highest rank in the kingdom, reserved "for those whom today we call Knights."<sup>84</sup> The problem was that of Palermo's political status, a theme having to do with the regional and Mediterranean role of the modern city and one of the utmost topicality at a time when, at the end of the civil war in Catalonia, a new and more centralized order was taking shape in the system of the Aragonese kingdoms. The claim of the people of Palermo to be of higher rank alluded to the capacity of its political class to engage directly in a dialogue with the Crown, without the mediation of the Viceroy. This brings us to the second aspect. The people in question is the community represented by an aristocracy whose praises Ranzano sang, and which embodied the new identity of the modern city, an aristocracy which did not have roots in the 14th century (which can therefore be wholly disregarded), nor even in the Vespers, but in events coming after 1392.<sup>85</sup> Ranzano's description of the new urban space, with its monuments and with the more recent alterations to the fabric of the city, was thus interwoven with an apology for the ruling class. In reality, however, the entire society had assumed a more clear-cut form, and a hierarchical order destined to prevail. Ranzano's work reflected this reality, which is why it appears to be an important symptom of the consolidation of a new urban identity.

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<sup>83</sup> Privitera, "Lotta politica," pp. 463ff.

<sup>84</sup> Ransano, *Delle origini*, p. 76.

<sup>85</sup> Privitera, "Lotta politica," pp. 469–75.

## TRANSVERSAL APPROACHES



PALERMO AS A STAGE FOR, AND A MIRROR OF,  
POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS FROM THE 12TH  
TO THE 15TH CENTURY

Laura Sciascia

Tommaso Fazello, a 16th century Sicilian historian, defined the site upon which Palermo arose as “an amphitheatre imagined by nature,” thereby identifying the essentially theatrical vocation of the island’s capital city.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, for someone arriving by land, from the interior of the island, and along the old roads, the so-called Conca d’Oro, a highly fertile plain green with citrus orchards up until a few decades ago but now grey with cement, does seem like a scene in an ancient theatre as seen from the auditorium. Someone arriving by sea, on the other hand, will see the city rise up as if on the stage of a modern theatre, with wings and back-cloth constituted by the mountains which surround it on three sides.

At the centre of this plain, on a hill, arose the ancient city, founded by the Phoenicians and then by turns a Greek, Roman and Byzantine settlement, ringed by walls. The structure of the city developed along a straight road, which ran from the port to the Acropolis. The arrival of the Muslims in Sicily, in 827 AD, would make Palermo, conquered after a long siege, the island’s capital: the ancient fortified city began to be called *al-qaṣr*. The long, straight road running across it was paved, and lined with shops, oratories and mosques, amongst them the great mosque. The city outgrew its walls, with three quarters and a military and administrative citadel, known as the *Khāliṣa*, the elect. But a visitor arriving from Baghdad, from the heart of the empire, would not have been deceived: Palermo was still, when all was said and done, a provincial city, large and densely populated, with the unmistakable stamp of the Islamic empire, but chaotic, inelegant, without any noteworthy buildings and monuments, and marked by the showy pretension of local notables.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Tommaso Fazello, *De rebus Siculis decades duae* (Catania, 1749), d. I, l. VIII, cap. I, p. 321.

<sup>2</sup> Ibn Ḥawqal’s, it., pp. 10ff., 182ff., 206ff.; on Ibn Ḥawqal in Sicily, see Michele Amari, *Storia dei musulmani di Sicilia* (Catania, 1933), 2: 336–354, and Adalgisa De Simone, “Palermo nei geografi e viaggiatori arabi del Medioevo,” *Studi Magribini* 2 (1968), p. 145ff.

## ACT I: THE NORMAN KINGDOM

*A Stage in Search of an Author*

In 1072 the Normans entered Palermo, which was thus the first great city in the whole of the vast Muslim empire to be reconquered. In this natural theatre, with exotic and precious props inherited from the Islamic metropolis, the Hauteville would stage the great spectacle of the birth of the Norman kingdom of Sicily. But even before entering Palermo the conquerors had celebrated their epiphany with a magisterial *coup de théâtre*: once the Muslims had been defeated at Misilmeri, at the very gates of Palermo, in an impressive part of the “natural amphitheatre” evoked by Fazello, Robert the Guiscard came across a small dovecot of messenger pigeons, an example of the advanced communications technology of the Muslim world, and immediately utilized them, writing messages with pens dipped in the blood of the fallen and tying them to the pigeons, thereby informing the city of the defeat.<sup>3</sup> The natural scenario in search of an author had come to life, and had found its directors and its actors.

After the conquest the urban landscape altered. At the top of the street that constitutes the city’s backbone, and is now called via Marmorea, there now loomed up, threatening and imposing, the castle, which would later become the royal Palace. Along the via Marmorea the cathedral extended one of its lateral facades, and churches practising Greek or Latin worship, and palaces, alternated with shops and warehouses. It would not be long before a second and much larger circuit of walls would encircle the outlying quarters.

*The King Makes His Entrance*

Here, in the Cathedral, at Christmas in 1130, Roger II of Hauteville, would be crowned King of Sicily, in a ceremony designed to serve as a public and irrefutable assertion of legitimacy. Alessandro of Telese, a Benedictine abbot and the author of a biography of Roger II, describes the coronation ceremony and the banquet: a procession of knights drawn up in double file

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<sup>3</sup> Gaufredi Malaterrae, *De rebus gestis Rogerii Calabriae et Siciliae comitis et Roberti Guiscardi ducis fratris eius*, ed. Ernesto Pontieri, RIS 2, V 1 (Bologna, 1928), 2: 50; Giuseppe Mandalà, “Il falconiere di Ögödey, i giardini del Minse e le colombe di Federico II. Frammenti di storia aviaria siciliana,” in Marcello Pacifico, Maria Antonietta Russo, Daniela Santoro and Patrizia Sardina, eds., *Storia, memoria identità. Scritti per Laura Sciascia* (Palermo, 2011), pp. 452ff.

accompanying Roger on the route from the Palace to the Cathedral, the magnificent harnesses of the horses, the draperies that covered the palace walls and the soft multi-coloured carpets laid out on the pavements, the abundance and delicacy of the food served at the banquet in the palace, presented in gold and silver vessels by servants dressed in silk.<sup>4</sup> In the city, the chronicler observes, “there was nothing but joy and light.”

The focal point of the city stage was the so-called *aula regia*, then known as the Sala Verde: situated directly beneath the towers of the Palace, it was a site expressly dedicated to the display of power. It was an open hall, large in size, and therefore suited to hosting huge gatherings, situated “in the middle of a spacious atrium, surrounded by a garden.” Admired by travelers and chroniclers, from Ibn Jubayr, in 1185, to the Catalan chronicler Ramon Muntaner, at the end of the 13th century, regarded for centuries as one of the most splendid and celebrated monuments in the city, the *aula regia* is also depicted schematically, and indicated by the name of *the- atrum imperialis Palacii*, in one of the miniatures accompanying the text of the *Liber ad honorem Augusti* by Peter of Eboli.<sup>5</sup> The miniature, like all the other images accompanying the text, is obviously very far from being a realistic representation of the monument, but, again like all the other images, it should be regarded as an illustration, employing a graphic language anticipating that of the comic strip, and designed to shed light on the essential features of the thing described, in a wholly different idiom, in the text: in this particular case, the elegance of the architecture with its slender columns and intersecting arches, the coolness of the fountain, and the real function of the Palace and the hall, namely, the collecting of taxes and the safeguarding of the Kingdom’s treasures.<sup>6</sup>

#### *The Director: George of Antioch, Emir of Emirs*

We know that Roger was very much aware of the customs and traditions of others, and ready to adopt any that might be to his advantage. But alongside him we can identify a “third power,” a director who was very shrewd, highly experienced and cosmopolitan in outlook, namely, George of Antioch,

<sup>4</sup> Alexandri Telesini abbatis, *Ystoria Rogerii regis Sicilie Calabrie atque Apulie*, eds. Ludovica De Nava and Dione Clementi, FSI 112 (Rome, 1991), pp. 25ff.

<sup>5</sup> Vincenzo Di Giovanni, “L’Aula Regia o la Sala Verde nel 1340,” in Id., *La topografia antica di Palermo dal sec. X al XV* (Palermo, 1889), 1, p. 371ff.; Petrus de Ebulo, *Liber ad honorem Augusti sive de rebus Siculis. Eine Bilderchronik der Stauferzeit aus der Burgerbibliothek Bern*, eds. Theo Kölzer, Gereon Becht-Jördens et alii (Sigmaringen, 1994).

<sup>6</sup> Petrus de Ebulo, *Liber*, p. 231 (see Fig. 10.1).



a Melkite Christian who had come to Sicily from Muslim Africa after having been in the service of the Byzantine Emperor. According to a late Egyptian biography, George, one of Roger's admirals and ministers, had taken great care to manage the King's image, advising him to restrict his public appearances to festivals and ceremonies, as the Eastern sovereigns did: "And before him there processed the horses saddled and bridled with saddles of gold and silver and with saddle-cloths encrusted with precious stones and with covered litters and again before him the gilded vessels and the parasol, and on his head the crown."<sup>7</sup> Here we see the first appearance in the Christian world, amongst the props used to represent power, of an accessory that would prove a great success: the parasol, in other words, the baldachin, donated to King Roger by the Fatimite Caliph, and adopted on the advice of his minister, George of Antioch. Another miniature in the *Liber ad honorem Augusti* shows the Empress Costanza, daughter of Roger II, in the act of receiving the ambassadors of Salerno while seated beneath a red baldachin, alongside her husband, the Emperor Henry VI. Almost two centuries later, in 1314, having signed a truce with Robert of Anjou, Frederick III entered Palermo and proceeded to the Palace *sub palatio*, that is, beneath a baldachin. Used by Richard the Lionheart after his return from Palestine, the baldachin would be adopted by Papal ceremonial in the second half of the 13th century, but appeared in France no earlier than the end of the 14th century.<sup>8</sup>

### *The City as Antagonist*

The protagonist of the staging of that Christmas of 1130 was Roger of Hauteville, his power and his authority at once splendid and terrible, but his antagonist, in the strictly theatrical sense, was the rich, defeated city, which flaunted its exotic luxury, not only in gold and silver but also in the shifting and multicoloured textile adornment of the stage and the costumes. Roger became king. Naples and Salerno, Puglia with its coastal cities and Calabria with its mountains, the Byzantine functionaries, the Longobard nobles, the Sicilian *gaiti* and the Norman knights were joined together in a single kingdom. Palermo, formerly the administrative centre

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<sup>7</sup> Adalgisa De Simone, "Il Mezzogiorno normanno-svevo visto dall'Islam africano," in Giosuè Musca, ed., *Il Mezzogiorno normanno-svevo visto dall'Europa e dal mondo mediterraneo* (Bari, 1999), p. 278.

<sup>8</sup> Bernard Guenée and Françoise Lehoux, *Les entrées royales françaises de 1328 à 1515* (Paris, 1968), p. 14.

of a province and of an island, became a capital and seat of power. But in the ceremony that turned Palermo into the capital of a kingdom, the relationship between city and king was as ambiguous as ever. Palermo might be a theatre of power but it was a slave to it also.

*Light and Grief*

The Hauteville would continue to use the urban stage tried out on the occasion of Roger's coronation for the celebrations put on by the Sicilian monarchy. The city served as backdrop and audience for cavalcades. Particularly picturesque in this regard were the cavalcade of the very handsome adolescent, William II, shortly after his coronation, which even won him the devotion of those who had hated his father,<sup>9</sup> and the entrance into the city of the very young wife of William II, Joan of England—who, one February night, entered a Palermo so brightly illuminated that night seemed day, and was led on horseback through the streets—dressed in regal garments and warmly applauded by the onlookers.<sup>10</sup> Yet the King's death was a performance too, as was the manner in which he was remembered: the lament for the death of William “the Bad” filled the city with ululations and dismal sounds, with the death bells being tolled uninterruptedly for three whole days. The death of his son, good King William, is dramatically depicted both in verse and in another, highly celebrated miniature in the codex of Peter of Eboli (which is also the sole surviving image of medieval Palermo).<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, the anniversaries of the deaths of sovereigns were solemnly remembered, even in the Angevin period, with illuminations and the burning of incense in the Cathedral.<sup>12</sup>

The relationship with the city would, however, change, and on various occasions the monarchy did not hesitate to display its own fragility in order to build an ever more precarious consensus. Hence the cavalcade of the young Duke Roger, the son of William I “the Bad,” during an attempted coup d'Etat against his father. Hence also, to a still more marked degree, the decision of the King to show himself, after this same crisis, when the intervention of the Palermitans had thwarted the aristocratic conspiracy

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<sup>9</sup> Ugo Falcando, *La Historia o Liber de regno Siciliae e la Epistola ad Petrum Panormitanae Ecclesiae thesaurarium*, ed. Giovanni Battista Siragusa, FSI 22 (Rome, 1897), p. 89.

<sup>10</sup> Roger of Hoveden, *Gesta Henrici II et Ricardi I*, MGH, SS, 17, p. 93.

<sup>11</sup> Ugo Falcando, *La Historia*, p. 88 ff., Petrus de Ebulo, *Liber*, p. 45 (see Fig. 10.2).

<sup>12</sup> *I registri della Cancelleria angioina ricostruiti da Riccardo Filangeri* (Naples, 2010), 50, p. 89.

against him, upon which occasion he showed himself to be profoundly upset, on the brink of tears, admitted his own faults and granted the city far-reaching fiscal privileges. In this circumstance, where there was a clash between the monarchy and nobles, Palermo managed to impose its own contractual might, and here it was the King, very far from being able to present the inaccessible and quasi-divine image that had been his father's, who sought the city's help and support against the nobles.<sup>13</sup>

*A Stage for a Prince: The Royal Garden*

Crowning at Palermo continued to be a moment of crucial importance for the successors to the Hauteville, beginning with Henry VI of Hohenstaufen, Holy Roman Emperor and husband of Costanza of Hauteville. Henry arrived in Palermo as a conqueror, on the march against the supporters of the last of the Hauteville, a child, son of Tancred of Lecce, illegitimate grandson of Roger II, who had contested the Swabian's right to the throne. No sooner had the imperial army arrived beneath its walls and begun its work of destruction than the city threw open its gates and welcomed the emperor, who was crowned in the cathedral and celebrated his triumph there.

Henry's arrival in Palermo is recounted by a Nordic source, the chronicle of the Benedictine monk Otto of Sankt Blasien, and by a southern one, the illuminated codex of Peter of Eboli. Both sources evoke the arrival of the German troops at the gates of Palermo and of the emperor's halt, prior to his entering the city, at the Favara, that is, one of the suburban palaces created by the Norman monarchy in the environs of the city, immersed in vast, luxurious gardens rich in pools and fountains, and full of rare plants and exotic animals. To the Favara, or Maredolce, the creation of King Roger, surrounded by an artificial lake that was also a fish reserve, was added the pavilion of the hunting park (Altofonte), the Zisa, built by William I, and the Cuba, his son's creation, all gardens represented with the usual synthetic and allusive realism in the *Liber ad honorem Augusti*, in one of the quadrants of the miniature, cited above, which describes the city's lamentations at the death of William II, in which one can make out, amongst other things, a palm with dates on it and a green parrot. The spectacle of power had here found a scenario in which sensual and aesthetic fascination were combined with a profound political meaning.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Ugo Falcando, *La Historia*, p. 62ff.

<sup>14</sup> Petrus de Ebulo, *Liber*, p. 47 (see Fig. 10.2).

since, as Henri Bresc has observed, it was a question “of representing, in the balance, peace, order and riches of the garden the sense of communion (implied by) the great royal ceremonies. . . . of subordinating nature to the artificial will of the prince,” and the Sicilian monarchy had been powerful or deserving enough—and again I cite Bresc—to have entrusted the care of it to a State deemed “abstract and perpetual.”<sup>15</sup>

### *The King at the Gates*

Otto of Sankt Blasien, a German and a supporter of the Swabian cause, describes the army drawing up outside the gates of the city, the kingdom’s *archisolium* and treasury, the devastation of the garden *amplissimum muro undique circumdatum*, created by the Norman sovereigns outside the walls, the massacre of the exotic animals, hunted down and devoured by the emperor’s troops, and the immediate surrender of the terrified city. Peter of Eboli gives a precise description of the garden and of the building, remains silent about the devastation wreaked by the German soldiers and simply says that the Emperor, when halting there, admired the work of his father-in-law, and after having received the city’s messengers, made a triumphal entrance into Palermo.

The miniature accompanying Peter of Eboli’s eloquent text vividly depicts the emperor receiving the city’s envoys, who have knelt at his feet, and who present him not with gifts but what appears to be the roll of urban privileges, while behind him are the soldiers drawn up in battle array wearing armour and with their lances in hand, and then we see the entry into Palermo.<sup>16</sup> The care with which the artist has represented the coats of mail, the helmets and the forming up of the emperor’s soldiers reflects the powerful impression made by the Teutonic military spectacle upon the city stage.

On the basis of a comparison between the different sources we can therefore posit the existence of a veritable ritual for the royal ingress into Palermo. The halt at La Favara may form part of the ritual for the sovereign’s arrival by land, because, once again according to Peter of Eboli, Tancred, the rival of Henry and Costanza, had also stopped there, before entering Palermo for his coronation and the celebration of his triumph. The miniature would then be one of the earliest representations so far recorded of a ritual of royal ingress. Having recognized the

<sup>15</sup> Henri Bresc, “Les jardins royaux de Palerme,” *MEFRM* 106/1 (1994), p. 258.

<sup>16</sup> Petrus de Ebulo, *Liber*, p. 191ff. (see Fig. 10.3).

halt at La Favara as a moment in a ritual we can go on to identify in later sources other such moments: for example, the arrival of the sovereigns by sea would involve an approach not through the city port, which today is the Cala, but through the so-called port of San Giorgio, that is to say, the present-day port, where one might halt on dry land prior to making an actual entrance into the city; indeed, it was here, in 1283, that Costanza of Swabia and her sons halted, clearly reviving an older ritual, and here too the Aragonese kings would disembark, from Frederick III, in triumph *sub pallio*, as we have seen, in 1314, to his successors, those defeated and driven from the city (Frederick IV, or “the simple,” in 1369), and those who would triumph over the city (in 1402 Blanche of Navarre, the second wife of Martin “the Younger” of Aragon, arrived at the port of San Giorgio).<sup>17</sup>

The sources also cast light upon the details of the urban celebration of a triumph. Thus, in the miniature from the *Liber ad honorem Augusti* Henry VI proceeds on horseback, holding in his hand a palm branch, as if openly alluding to the image of Christ entering Jerusalem, always a feature of the Sicilian mosaic cycles; a handful of trumpeters in turbans precede him, some of them black, and a group of soldiers, threatening and in serried ranks, follows on behind. A comparison with Tancred’s earlier triumph is very telling. Given his unabashed concern to flatter the new sovereign, the miniaturist comes close to caricaturing Tancred’s procession, which is accompanied not only by trumpets, but also by drums and cymbals, by a small group of unarmed knights and by some archers, quite different from the Emperor’s fearsome Teutonic warriors. The verses accompanying the image give a grotesque account of Tancred, dismissing him as a usurper, who is physically repugnant, a dwarf with the face of a monkey, borne in triumph through the streets of “sweet Palermo.”

Peter of Eboli’s text simply gives a description of the peace that descends upon the city and upon the court, purged of all vice. Otto of Sankt Blasien tells of the carpets and garlands that festooned the city, of the standards that fluttered above the city walls, of the scented wood burnt in the streets, of the procession of Palermitan elders, youths and children who went to greet the Emperor, of the musical instruments of every kind, of the dazzling armour worn by the German soldiers and of the rhythmic step with which they advanced towards the city, and of the

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<sup>17</sup> Ramon Muntaner, *Cronaca*, in Raimondo Muntaner, Bernardo d’Esclot, *Cronache catalane*, trans. Filippo Moisè (Palermo, 1984), p. 125; Maria Rita Lo Forte Scirpo, *C’era una volta una regina . . . Due donne per un regno: Maria d’Aragona e Bianca di Navarra* (Naples, 2003), p. 161.

citizens prostrating themselves, even to the extent of touching the ground with their faces, *iuxta morem ipsius terre*.

The festival unfolding on the urban stage served to mask the city's unconditional surrender. The emperor's object was the palace with its treasury, the infinite riches of Puglia, Sicily and Calabria to be distributed amongst his retinue or sent back to Germany. But the characteristic features of a ritual of ingress lend weight to the hypothesis that Palermo at the end of the twelfth century was already capable of expressing a message of "civic identity," even if one that fell well short of the kinds of peremptory statement voiced in the cities of North Italy.

### *The Curtain Falls*

The son of Henry VI, Frederick II of Swabia, King of Sicily and from 1220 Emperor of Germany, spent his entire childhood and adolescence in Palermo. The vast scope of the sovereign's interests, the complexity of the political situation and, indeed, his own personality led to the city becoming the empty shell of regality, but the Emperor sought to export beyond the bounds of the Kingdom the splendid and terrible regal image of his grandfather. The servants dressed in silk and the horses with the precious harnesses which had rendered his grandfather's coronation so magnificent, the black musicians who sounded the trumpets on the day of his father's triumphal ingress into Palermo, the court eunuchs, the Saracen dancing girls, the exotic animals (camels, leopards, a giraffe and even an elephant) followed the emperor and fed the legends that surrounded him, while the most splendid and extraordinary of the stage costumes of the Norman monarchy, the red mantle embroidered with gold thread, decorated with a palm tree weighed down with fruit and with two lions bringing down two camels, created in the royal workshop at Palermo for King Roger, went into the imperial treasury and remained there, alongside the crown of Charlemagne.<sup>18</sup> At Palermo the curtain had come down, and the play was now being performed somewhere else.

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<sup>18</sup> Ernst Kantorowicz, *Frederick the Second, 1194–1250*, trans. Emily Overend Lorimer (London, 1957), p. 323.

## ACT TWO: THE CITY AS PROTAGONIST

*The New Actors*

The coronation of Manfred of Swabia, son of Frederick II, in the Cathedral in Palermo, was a key moment in the legitimization of the last of the Swabians, but precisely what its impact on the city was we do not know. The gift of a hundred very handsome negro slaves *in sue naturalis nigredinis deformitate formosi*, who were riding as many mules—offered on that occasion to the prince by Enrico Abbate, Frederick II's high-ranking functionary who, after having defeated the Guelphs at Lentini in 1256, set the seal on Manfred's domination of the island through the conquest of Palermo—does however indicate that the spectacular and exotic element in urban ceremony was still a fundamental requisite of the monarchy.<sup>19</sup>

The entrance of the Swabian prince's troops does nevertheless mark a turning-point in the history of urban society in Sicily. We discern at this juncture the first signs of a ruling class consisting of functionaries, jurists and *milites*, natives of the kingdom, Greek or even descended from converted *gaiti*, who in the second half of the 13th century assumed the leadership of the city. The urban stage had been wholly abandoned by the Angevin monarchy, and the scrupulous inventory of the contents of the Palace consigned to the *provisor castrorum* in May 1274 lists, with ill-concealed contempt, amongst the wreckage of past splendour, alongside ostrich eggs, marble and mosaic mullions, ivory boxes, all old, broken, worthless stuff, also some *aquilas ligneas depictas inutiles*.<sup>20</sup>

On this empty stage the new urban caste began to display its power, in the shape of its houses, which nestled beneath the circle of the walls of the old city, in the immediate vicinity of one of the ancient gates, linked to a large garden just outside the walls. The residence of the Ebdemonia, which would later be that of the chief executioner Matteo di Termini—beside Busuldeni gate, the Negroes' Gate of the Muslim City—boasting a reception room, called by the Arabic term *ka'a*, adorned with orange trees and overlooking a garden situated beyond the ancient walls, in the Albergheria;<sup>21</sup> the palace of the Calvellis, the heirs of the Fallamonica,

<sup>19</sup> *Die Chronik des Saba Malaspina*, MGH SS, 35 (Hannover, 1999), eds. Walter Koller and August Nitschke, p. 134.

<sup>20</sup> *I registri della Cancelleria angioina*, 50, p. 182.

<sup>21</sup> Carmelo Ardizzzone, ed., *I diplomi esistenti nella Biblioteca Comunale ai Benedettini* (Catania, 1927), doc. no. 121.

on the walls towards the Seralcadi, with the great garden of *Aynirumi*, in which a treasure-trove of gold and jewels would be recovered;<sup>22</sup> the *domus magna*, which had belonged to the Maletta, near to the gate of the Giudecca, on the road leading to the Albergheria, featuring a *corridorium*, an arcade, a *theatrum*, a large portico, and a garden planted with orange and lemon trees just outside the walls (it would later be the oldest Palermitan residence of the Chiaromonte);<sup>23</sup> and finally the houses, the *domus magne*, of the Mostrangelo, situated where the convent of Santa Caterina now stands, next to the Porta di Mare, the *Bebilbacal*, were linked up to the garden of *Aynbuchamar* and overlooked the large space in front of the church of Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio, founded in fact by Roger II's shrewd minister, George of Antioch, where on Easter Monday 1282, under the direction of Ruggero Mastrangelo, the bloody performance of the Vespers would be staged, and where the communal palace would be erected.<sup>24</sup>

The church of Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio and the space in front of it were therefore the new focal point of the urban theatre, and there the original and multicoloured elegance of the Palermitan ladies, admired, one Christmas night long before, by Ibn Jubayr, was on display. There might be seen an unending sequence of red and gold silks, decorated with disks *ad aves*, in which might be recognized a motif characteristic of the most precious and ancient Sicilian textiles, or with floral motifs, long, low-cut gowns (*ciprisii*), festooned with fringes and pleats, in bright colours, decorated with gold and amber buttons, hats of an exotic style and made of precious fabrics, veils in bold colours, green, gold and orange, glittering with gold, precious and unfamiliar jewels, earrings or pendants, strings of pearls, which were given an equally wide variety of exotic names, of Arab origin but put to refinedly Palermitan uses. A mantle of red silk with golden disks was thus called *macca*, a string of pearls was known as *syllic*,

<sup>22</sup> Andrea Romano, *Famiglia, successioni e patrimonio familiare nell'Italia medievale e moderna* (Turin, 1994), p. 203ff.; for the treasure, *ACFUP* 7 (Palermo, 2007), docs. nos. 181, 191, 193, and Iris Mirazita, *Trecento siciliano, da Corleone a Palermo* (Naples, 2003), p. 197ff.

<sup>23</sup> *ACFUP*, 5 (Palermo, 1986), doc. no. 185: alongside the palace there developed an economic structure which ensured a complete cycle, from production to sale, realised with a shop for the selling of garden produce and a tavern (ASP, not. Giacomo de Citella, reg. 77, cc. 29 r, 76 v; reg. 78, c. 191 v).

<sup>24</sup> ASP, *Corporazioni religiose soppresse*, Convento di s. Domenico, vol. 62; Laura Sciascia, "Per una storia di Palermo nel Duecento (e dei toscani in Sicilia): la famiglia di Ruggero Mastrangelo," in Marina Montesano, ed., *Come l'orco della fiaba. Studi in onore di Franco Cardini* (Florence, 2010), pp. 581–594.



the dark blue colour used in veils was dubbed *kyachla*. Of particular interest is the case of the pendant earrings, which two different ladies called by two different forms, *acrati* or *carade*, of the same Arabic word (*qurṭ*, *aqrāt* plur.), a subtle but reliable testimony to urban society's familiarity throughout the whole of the 13th century with Arabic.<sup>25</sup>

After the Vespers, the rituals of spectacular regality staged by the Normans were revived by Peter the Great of Aragon and Costanza of Swabia, and by their children, and scrupulously respected, especially after the arrival in Palermo of the Queen, whom the Sicilians, according to Ramon Montaner, considered their *dona natural*. Costanza's entrance into Palermo followed a script plainly based upon models inherited from the Norman, and from the Swabian monarchies. Costanza, with the infants Giacomo and Federico, arrived by sea, disembarked at the port of San Giorgio, made the sign of the cross, kissed the ground, made her way to the nearest church to give thanks, and immediately there took shape the cavalcade that led them through the streets of Palermo, accompanied by the jubilant crowd, as far as the Cathedral, which the Queen entered, in order to pray on her own, and then up to the Palace. A few days later, under the direction of Giovanni da Procida and Corrado Lancia, repositories of the traditions of the Sicilian court, a performance of Swabian legitimacy once again unfolded. The stage was indeed the Sala Verde, the *aula regia*, where thrones had been set out for the Queen, the infants and the court dignitaries, whereas for the others carpets were laid out on the ground: here the representatives of all the Sicilian cities would assemble; here, just as the *logotheta* used to speak on behalf of the Norman Kings, and Pietro della Vigna on behalf of the Emperor, so too Giovanni da Procida spoke for the Queen; here, following the prescribed ritual for the opening of royal letters, a letter written by Peter the Great was read out, and here the Sicilians accepted as their sovereigns Costanza and Peter, and their descendants. The city had a twofold part to play in this ceremony. As the seat of regality, and guardian of its traditions and values, Palermo served as guarantor of the legitimacy of Peter of Aragon and of his children. On the other hand, as the city that had used unprecedented violence in driving out the French, and that had paved the way for the change which

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<sup>25</sup> For *acrati*, earrings, Girolamo Caracausi, *Arabismi medievali di Sicilia* (Palermo, 1983), L. 299; it was Adalgisa Simone, a very dear friend and a remarkable Arabist, who identified the two different forms of the same Arabic word. The two jewels belonged to two Palermitan ladies who were in fact related, Palma, the widow of Ruggero Mastrangelo and Costanza Ebdemonia, the widow of Matteo de Termini.

had brought the new sovereigns on to the throne, it imposed its own new and altered status upon the sovereigns and the various constituent parts of the Kingdom.

Thirteen years later, after the Treaty of Anagni, and the refusal of the Sicilians to accept it, the Green Hall served as the backdrop to what we may regard as the final scene played by the Sicilian monarchy on the Palermitan stage, namely, the coronation of Frederick of Aragon, the third-born child of Peter the Great. Just as at the coronation of his ancestors, the grandees of the kingdom, the representatives of all the townships arrived in Palermo, which was ablaze with lights and rang with music and song. The streets were strewn with myrtle; banquets and tournaments delighted the city for days on end. Before the coronation Ruggero di Lauria spoke on behalf of the King, and after it Frederick rode through the city, with the crown on his head and the globe and sceptre in his hand, wearing the royal garments. But between Roger II and Frederick III, between the splendid and exotic Palermo of 1130 and the Palermo that cried "mora, mora!", much had changed. Once he had returned to the Sala Verde, Frederick spoke directly to his subjects, without employing a dignitary as an intermediary, as Sicilian regal tradition dictated.<sup>26</sup> The King was no longer a quasi-divine being, before whom one had to prostrate oneself, but Palermo was no longer simply a stage either. Palermo was now a city that wished to impose itself as protagonist, while still remaining the capital.

### *Scene Change*

We have already said that the miniature in the *Liber ad honorem Augusti* representing the city grief-stricken at the death of William II is the only extant medieval image of Palermo, but it is also a synthetic and exhaustively detailed portrait of the city at the end of the 12th century. The image captures the variety of the ethnic groups, emphasised by the features and clothing of the persons represented; the topographic and administrative divisions, in which are delineated the four quarters, later becoming eight as listed in city records and then, in the 14th century, five; the social stratification, with the anonymous *cives Panormi*, barefoot and modestly dressed, huddled in a corner; and even the growing religious Latinization, indicated by the presence of Cistercian monks stationed in the Kalsa, where shortly afterwards Henry VI himself would set up the Lodge

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<sup>26</sup> Nicolò Speciale, "Historia sicula," in Rosario Gregorio, ed., *Bibliotheca scriptorum qui res in Sicilia gestas sub Aragonum imperio retulere* (Palermo, 1791), 1, p. 354ff.

(*Magione*) of the Teutonic Knights. The circle of the walls is no more than hinted at, a thin line linking up two towers, on the left-hand margin of the image; the Cathedral, which in other contexts serves as the city's symbol, even becoming its heraldic attribute, is nowhere to be seen. It is the sites of the monarchy that dominate: the Palace, with its towers, the decorated chapel, the tall bell-tower with its bells, the castle out at sea—the other city fortress, serving to guard the port, its walls bristling with catapults—and the garden, the *viridarium Genoard*, occupy over half the picture. The city portrayed is indubitably the city of Kings, and as such it took its cue from the sites of regality.

An image of Palermo at the beginning of the 14th century would look very different. Now the city is composed of five quarters. To the four quarters delineated in the miniature, namely, Cassero, which corresponds to the old city, Kalsa, Seralcadi and Ideysin (which, after having welcomed the rebels from some centres situated inland, deported to Palermo by Frederick II, has taken on the name of Albergheria), a new quarter was added, commercial and artisanal in nature, which adopted the name of one of the gates to the old city, the Patitelli gate. Cassero still enjoyed the greatest social, political and, I would argue, aesthetic prestige, and over it there now towered the palazzo comunale, which from 1321 would be called by the Roman name of Praetorium, Palermo being an *urbs* and not a *civitas*. As the new focus of the urban stage, the Praetorium now drew the cathedral into its orbit: the building began, in fact on the initiative of the Mastrangelo, of a new and monumental bell-tower, the true symbol of the city of the Vespers. The church thus became the rallying-point for the various social components of the city, and its new role was expressed in the Festival of the Assumption of the Madonna, on 15th August. The culminating moment of the Festival was the nocturnal, candle-lit procession, which represented a staging of urban society phrased in terms of the relative sizes of the candles offered to the Madonna: the heaviest being the *milites'* candle, followed by that of the jurists and of the men of letters (which weighed half as much), and then by the far smaller one carried by the notaries and clerks of the Praetorian Court.<sup>27</sup>

The bond between Cathedral and Praetorium was also in evidence on the occasion of the procession by means of which the city gave thanks for the recovery of Frederick III and his son from a grave illness: the relics of one of the city's patron saints, St. Cristina, were borne in proces-

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<sup>27</sup> *ACFUP*, 5, doc. no. 70, and 6, doc. no. 66.

sion, accompanied by chants *alta et incessabili voce*, from the Cathedral up to the church of Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio, where an image of the Madonna particularly venerated by the sovereign was kept. Then the whole city, assembled in front of the palazzo comunale, thanked God for the King's recovery and prayed that he would remain in good health<sup>28</sup>. When alluding to Frederick III's devotion to the icon kept at Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio, some also said that the King, when he was in Palermo, would go there every Saturday to pray to her, conduct that we may interpret as evidence of a new city ritual regularly bringing the King close to the throbbing centre of the capital. The regal image of Frederick III (the King who protected the Franciscan Spirituals and accepted from Arnold of Villanova a programme of reforms inspired by evangelical poverty) who carried in his arms and fed the babies from the population fleeing Messina when it was under siege, and who had earmarked for the poor the revenues from the very rich county of Modica confiscated from Giovanni Chiaromonte, was very different from the image of his ancestors, just as the Palermo that had perpetrated the Vespers and was building the Palazzo comunale was different from the city that had been the *archisolium* of the Kingdom, of the whole of southern Italy. In the simple ceremony of the King's Saturday prayer at the Martorana we may glimpse the outline of a new *modus vivendi* between city and monarchy.

### *The Distant King*

But royal visits were sporadic: on these occasions Palermo celebrated, welcomed its august guests with music and illuminations, and offered them gifts. In 1329 the music used to greet Peter II and his wife, Queen Elizabeth of Corinthia would be played by two *tubatores*, a trumpeter and a *naccaratus*, mounted on horses with saddle-cloths decorated with the heraldic symbol of the city, a golden eagle on a red field, and they would receive a gift in money. For a visit paid by one of the infants the gift would be a pedigree bay horse, while for Frederick III's last visit, shortly before his death, the *exenium* would consist of two pieces of silver plate.<sup>29</sup>

Frederick III's successors, Peter II and Louis, would be crowned at Palermo, but city records and the chronicles retain only an unembellished

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., docs. 44 and 45, p. 83ff.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., doc. 118, p. 209; *Chronicon siculum*, in Gregorio, *Bibliotheca*, vol. II, p. 241; a critical edition of the text, edited by Pietro Colletta, is in preparation, to appear in the series FSI dell'Istituto storico Italiano per il Medioevo.

recollection of the event, and furnish no details regarding the ceremonies that were held. The sudden death of Peter II created an alarming situation, because the regent, brother to the dead king, when inviting the city to prepare within two weeks the ceremony for the coronation of the new king, a child but four years old, explained that he was not able to attend, due to his health and military commitments. Fearing that the regent's absence would in fact mean the absence of an interlocutor in the dialogue with the Crown constituted by the moment of coronation, the city hurriedly dispatched its ambassadors to the court, with some precise requests and, above all, with the entreaty that the regent appoint a representative who could confirm the city's privileges and also grant some new ones. The city's fears proved to be well-founded, since the confirmation of its privileges occurred a full fortnight after the coronation in Catania.<sup>30</sup>

Since they had been absent from Palermo when living, sovereigns and members of the royal family would no longer be buried in the Cathedral. Only Peter II would have his funeral in Palermo, and the perfume which, according to one chronicler, emanated from his body at the very moment it was shut into the tomb of the Emperor Frederick, was still an ancient perfume redolent of the exotic and mysterious ceremonies of Norman Palermo.<sup>31</sup> The ritual of the ceremonies, a language entailing dialogue between city and monarchy, was now a dead language.

The divorce between Palermo and the Aragonese dynasty was physically manifested in the progressively degraded state of the Sala Verde. During Frederick III's reign the once splendid monument began to show the first signs of deterioration, though the sovereign had taken steps to effect some precarious repairs. Three years after Frederick III's death a fresh fall of masonry caused a part of the roof to be destroyed, and eight days later the city wrote to Peter II, informing him of the disaster. After a melancholy summoning up of past glories, of the ancient kings and of the "resplendent and vast" edifices built by them, and after a terse description of their current state of dereliction, the city invited the sovereign to take measures to restore so illustrious a monument, because *non maior laus est nova construere quam vetusta servare*. Two years went by, and still the work of restoration had not been effected; the iron coming from the building regarded by the city as one of the wonders of the world was being

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<sup>30</sup> *ACFUP*, 7, docs. nos. 255, 257, 258, 260.

<sup>31</sup> *Chronicon siculum*, p. 263.

used to repair the city walls. The stage settings of the Norman monarchy, being no longer used, now served to reinforce the city which was, as we would do well to remember, a city at war, constantly threatened by Angevin ships.<sup>32</sup>

### *Rubble*

In recounting the festivities at Frederick II's coronation both the Sicilian Nicolò Speciale and Ramon Montaner had insisted on the fact that among the various entertainments were an abundance of tournaments, archery contests and bouts with staffs. The feudal nobility, introduced by the sovereign himself, was making its debut on an urban stage. In the course of the first half of the 14th century, under pressure of war, the big feudal families became ever more useful and therefore ever more present and indeed dominant. In Palermo two great families emerged, the Sclafani and the Chiaromonte. Their success in imposing themselves on urban society found expression, in the urbanistic fabric, in the guise of their new places of residence, quite different from the complex and articulated properties of the previous century: massive, square edifices "in the form of independent and isolated blocks endowed with porticoed inner courtyards, around which the milieux of family life unfolded," and the prototype of a model that would last until the 19th century.<sup>33</sup> The urban stage, hitherto restricted to the old city, was now, through the construction of what very soon would begin to be called the Steri, being extended to include new quarters.

The crisis precipitated by the Black Death assisted the rise of the Chiaromonte. At roughly the same time, in 1350, the "ancient and precious" cathedral suffered an "unforeseeable, accidental circumstance," a catastrophic collapse: the bell-tower, built over forty years of effort and sacrifice, unhappily fell down, so that the city, already sorely tried by plague, famine, and by a winter of storms and ice, was forced to ask Pope Clement VI to grant special indulgences to those who contributed to the rebuilding and, above all, to the getting rid of the rubble, of the *turpem deformitatem* that marred the church after the collapse.<sup>34</sup> Whereas the collapse of the Sala Verde had marked the end of the Palermo of the Kings,

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<sup>32</sup> *ACFUP*, 9, docs. 31, 53.

<sup>33</sup> Maria Giuffrè, "L'architettura religiosa", in *Federico III d'Aragona re di Sicilia (1296-1337)* (Palermo, 1997), p. 215.

<sup>34</sup> *ACFUP*, 9, docs. 31, 53.

that of the bell-tower buried under its “vile” rubble the end of the Palermo of the Vespers.

*The Lords of Palermo*

From 1351 to 1392 Palermo lived under the dominion of the Chiaromonte, but for these forty years we lack both the storytelling voices of the chroniclers and city records, these latter having been destroyed, though not at the sovereign’s behest, after the Aragonese monarchical restoration.<sup>35</sup> We therefore do not know if the Chiaromonte had created a new rituality, nor what patterns they may have employed. The chronicler we are used to calling Michele da Piazza does, however, bear witness to their theatrical use of urban institutions.<sup>36</sup>

Manfredi Chiaromonte gave formal expression to citizens’ grief at the death of poor Frederick IV “the simple:” marginalized, weak, absent from the city, the monarchy continued nonetheless to have a presence in its rituals. This is borne out by the *Ordo cereorum*,<sup>37</sup> the processional order responsible for the candles used in the illuminations at the mid-August festival, which provides a snapshot of an urban society very different from that of the early 14th century. Since the *milites*, the ruling class reflecting the 13th century city, had disappeared, the procession began with the candle of the representatives of the most important urban confraternity, that of the Continents, with that of the paupers, meaning the *pauperes Christi*, the recipients of public charity, and with that of the Archbishop and of the royal palace; it continued with those of the various crafts, from the humblest to the prestigious bankers, doctors, chemists and cloth merchants, and then with the candles of the different city quarters; finally with those of the notaries and customs officials, ending with the *Cereus domini regis*, the King’s candle, though just then the King was a Queen, in a far-off land and a prisoner. There was no trace of, nor even any allusion to, the Lord of Palermo, Manfredi Chiaromonte, but a reference to a wholly disembodied monarchy, a pale statue or shadow of its former self.

<sup>35</sup> Laura Sciascia, “Introduzione” to *ACFUP*, 9, p. XXIV.

<sup>36</sup> Michele da Piazza, *Cronaca*, in *Bibliotheca*, 2, p. 71ff.; a critical edition of this chronicle, edited by Marcello Moscone, is also in preparation.

<sup>37</sup> Simone da Lentini, *Chronicon*, in *Bibliotheca*, II, p. 310.

## ACT THREE: A DISTANT MIRROR

*The Scene Changes Once Again*

On 22 March 1392 Martin of Montblanc, heir to the throne of Aragon, together with the sovereigns of Sicily, his son and his daughter-in-law Maria, daughter of Frederick IV “the simple” and the last surviving heir to the Kingdom, kidnapped fourteen years before from Ursino castle in Catania, disembarked in Sicily. A few days later the troops commanded by the sovereigns who had come from Barcelona encircled Palermo by land and sea. On 13 May Andrea Chiaromonte and Palermo surrendered; immediately afterwards Chiaromonte was charged with treachery, tried and decapitated in the square in front of his family palace.

The monarchy had returned to Palermo, but as theatrical producer the Duke of Montblanc aspired to a new *mis-en-scène*. The palace of the Norman Kings, the Sala Verde and its props must by then have become dilapidated, and the sovereigns’ seat would therefore now be the Chiaromonte’s palace, a choice suggested as much by its position, close to the port, as by the need to erase the memory of the Lords of Palermo. As early as 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1393 a start was made on the rebuilding.<sup>38</sup> Alongside the palace the Duke immediately began to build a new hall, with functions similar to those of the Sala Verde. But the dialogue between the King and the city faltered, for Palermo was a wounded city, and so much so that when the birth of the heir to the throne was imminent, it was the King himself who ruled against spending too lavishly on the festivities. On the other hand, the decapitation of the last of the Chiaromonte had marked with blood the recovery of the new spaces on the urban stage: the square that had been a theatre for the execution would two centuries later become the site of the fires of the Inquisition.

In 1412, with the Compromise of Caspe, Sicily became once and for all a part of the Crown of Aragon. In 1415, the first viceroy would arrive. With the palace of the Norman Kings abandoned, the viceroys inherited the seat chosen by Martin of Aragon, the Chiaromonte’s Steri. Yet if the Palace, the *Sacrum regium Palacium*, still kept at least in its name its aura of sacrality, the Steri, the *regium hospicium*, born as the prestigious residence of one particular family—it was not by accident that its most extraordinary feature, the painted ceiling of the great hall, decorated entirely

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<sup>38</sup> Di Giovanni, *La topografia*, II, p. 84ff.



with subject matter drawn from medieval chivalric culture, was inside, open only to those received by the great family in order to celebrate a private event, the second marriage of Manfredi to Eufemia Ventimiglia—would never be successfully turned into the seat of the monarchy, and this despite the addition of the hall, planned at the very beginning of the monarchical restoration. In the hall was placed another important element from the symbolic trappings of power, namely, the faldstool, the characteristic throne in the shape of a stool from which the European sovereigns used to administer justice,<sup>39</sup> and at the beginning of the 15th century an ostrich<sup>40</sup> was housed there, in a bid to transfer the symbolic values of the monarchy to the new seat.

The urban theatre now became the mirror of the power of a distant monarchy, and the ceremonies unfolding there celebrated remote events which, through the very fact of their being remote, had necessarily to be represented. Thus, on 30 November 1469, the city celebrated the marriage of Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon: a great procession of the religious set out from the church of Sant' Andrea, the saint for that day; the streets were decked with evergreen branches, and every house displayed its best draperies, carpets and embroideries. The culminating moment of the festival was the nocturnal illumination, which followed the line of the city walls with fires laid at every eight paces, and was picked up again, inside the city, by a torchlight procession, which began at the Praetorium, and in which the whole city, on horseback, took part. A spectacle that was also, and above all, appreciated from a distance, by the ships in the port and by the hinterland; the splendour of the fires of Palermo revealed, to the Kingdom and to the sea itself, the birth of the Spanish empire.<sup>41</sup> In the same fashion, the Treaty of Pedralbes would be celebrated, three

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<sup>39</sup> Salvatore Fodale, "Martino l'umano e i 'beni culturali' siciliani: restauri e spoliazioni," *La Memoria. Annali della facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia* 7 (1993), p. 45; for a synthetic account of the history of the Steri, from residence of the Chiaramonte to royal palace to seat of the Inquisition, see Laura Sciascia, "Il palazzo invisibile; lo Steri di Palermo dai Chiaromonte all'Inquisizione," in *Città e vita cittadina nei paesi dell'area mediterranea, secoli XI–XV* (Roma, 2006), pp. 759–766.

<sup>40</sup> Represented as one of the symbols of power in the mosaics of Monreale, the *faldistorium*, fashioned from old and precious stones, and to a value of 1500 onze, also formed part of the lavish dowry of Costanza of Swabia, daughter of Manfred and wife of Peter III of Aragon: Daniel Girona i Llagostera, *Mullerament de l'infant en Pere de Cathalunya ab Madona Constança de Sicilia* (Barcelona, 1908), p. 58ff. A cathedra of gold also formed part of the dowry William II had promised to Joan of England: Richard of Devizes, MGH, SS, XXVII, p. 76.

<sup>41</sup> ASP, Secrezia, reg. 352, c. 145.

years later, with festivities lasting eight days, in the course of which there appeared a novelty that was destined to endure: three allegorical cars, sumptuously adorned, upon which three radiant girls impersonated peace, might and victory, humanistic culture's homage to power. Other distant events were celebrated just as sumptuously: the esequies of John II of Aragon in 1479 and the capture of Malaga in 1487.<sup>42</sup>

The *luminaria* continued to be the crucial moment in the mid-August festival. To the procession with candles, in which all the active elements in the city were obliged to take part, were added from 1465 onwards a series of contests, one involving a race between black slaves and another between boats which set out from outside the walls and strove to reach the city. In this fashion Palermo expressed its dominion over the territory, by then rendered more lucrative through the cultivation of sugar cane.

### *Theatres*

Palermo's last encounter with a monarch was in 1535, upon the occasion of Charles V's visit. Charles's entry into the city was through a monumental gate, newly built and inaugurated for the occasion, situated beside the Palace of the Normans. After the halt in the cathedral the procession went down the long via Marmorea, decorated with triumphal arches, and made its way to what would be the emperor's residence, the palace of a family of rich bankers of Pisan origin. The focus of the ceremony would however be the palace that had belonged to the Chiaromonte, but from 1392 had been the *hospicium regium*. Here, perhaps, in the very hall planned and designed for the purpose by Martin "the humane," a session of Parliament was held. The urban stage was now very far removed from the consecrated royal palace of the Normans and from the Sala Verde; indeed, its centre was still close to the port, in the zone within which the palaces of the new urban aristocracy were being built, whether it was a question of settling the finishing post for a horse race or receiving the Emperor.

In order to devise an appropriately theatrical context for the Spanish monarchy, it was decided to undertake a bold piece of town-planning, involving the cutting of a new road, the via Maqueda, which transected the ancient Cassaro at right angles. Where the two roads crossed, a small octagonal square was formed: on its four built-up sides were created

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<sup>42</sup> Pietro Ransano, *Delle origini e vicende di Palermo, e Dell' entrata di re Alfonso in Napoli, scritture siciliane del secolo XV, pubbl. e illustr. su' codici della comunale di Palermo da G. di Marzo* (Palermo, 1864), p. 34.

four different monumental complexes, with its various storeys featuring statues of the four seasons, four sovereigns and four patron saints of Palermo. The square was the new focal point in the urban theatre, and it set the seal on the theatralization of the space of the city, a constant feature of Baroque Palermo. Also known as the theatre of the sun, because the sun shone on one of its wings at every moment of the day, the square was in fact the theatre of the monarchy, a *retablo* of the Spanish Empire. Where the monarchy's other theatre was concerned, the ancient *theatrum* of the Palace of the Normans, Roger II's *aula regia*, sufficient remnants of it still survived at the beginning of the 16th century for one to be able to gain a sense of the grandeur and beauty of the building.<sup>43</sup> Demolished so as to clear the ground for new fortifications, rollers were used to level off the ruins in 1554. The Viceroy had abandoned the Steri and returned to the Palace of the Normans, and had judged it necessary to install artillery in the space in front, in order to defend the Palace if ever the city should rise up in open rebellion.<sup>44</sup> Demolished so as to clear the ground for new fortifications, rollers were used to level off the ruins in 1554. The Viceroy had abandoned the Steri and returned to the Palace of the Normans, and had judged it necessary to install artillery in the space in front, in order to defend the Palace if ever the city should rise up in open rebellion.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Henri Bresc, "Le giostre e le mostre: la patria palermitana di fronte al pericolo turco," in *Studi storici dedicati ad Orazio Cancila* (Palermo, 2011), p. 66ff.

<sup>44</sup> Federico del Carretto, *De africano bello per invictissimum imperatorem Carolum V gesto*, in *Opuscoli di autori siciliani* (Catania, 1758), 1, p. 75ff.

<sup>45</sup> Fazello, *De rebus Siculis*, p. 330.



Fig. 10.1. The *theatrum imperialis Palatii* (Peter of Eboli, *Liber ad honorem Augusti*, Burgerbibliothek Bern, Cod. 120 II, f<sup>o</sup> 142 r.)



Fig. 10.2. William II's death (Peter of Eboli, *Liber ad honorem Augusti*, Burgerbibliothek Bern, Cod. 120 II, f° 98 r.)



Fig. 10.3. The emperor Henry VI receives Palermo's envoys before making a triumphal entrance into Palermo (Peter of Eboli, *Liber ad honorem Augusti*, Burgerbibliothek Bern, Cod. 120 II, f<sup>o</sup> 134 r.)



## THE CITY OF FOREIGNERS: PALERMO AND THE MEDITERRANEAN FROM THE 11TH TO THE 15TH CENTURY

Gian Luca Borghese

Far more than was the case with other great ports of the Mediterranean, medieval Palermo derived an essential part of its identity from the sea. Without slackening its hold upon a vast and fertile hinterland which provided it with an overflowing basket of agricultural produce, the city long kept its gaze turned towards the sea from which there came a steady flow of foreigners, first and foremost merchants. As Laura Sciascia has observed, Palermitans had bread at home, but their wheat, before it ever became bread, passed through the hands of Tuscan, Genoese or Catalan merchants.<sup>1</sup> Aside from merchants, the sea also brought conquerors, mercenaries, migrants, slaves and adventurers. Once they had settled in the city and formed organised groups or communities, they exerted a huge influence, from the economic, social and cultural point of view, upon the evolution of its urban identity. Those incomers who were militarily strong or politically powerful did not necessarily play a more important role in Palermo's affairs than others who in the end proved to be more active in the city's commercial or cultural life. What one almost constantly found was the arrival of new communities of foreigners, while others, which had already been present for some time and were by this point in decline, were merging with the rest of the Palermitan population, except when the process of assimilation was not realised and the outcomes were therefore more dramatic. All this made Palermo a very particular kind of city, in one respect markedly different from the rest of Sicily in its exogenous components, but in another respect disposed with the passage of time to assimilate them and to render them characteristically local, imparting to them a pride precisely in belonging to the *felix urbs Panormi*. We shall therefore try to rehearse its history by following in the tracks of the foreigners who frequented the city, settled there, flourished there, and, driven by certain recurrent socio-economic dynamics, were adopted by it or else driven out of it.

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<sup>1</sup> *Registri di lettere (1321-22 e 1335-36)*, ed. Laura Sciascia, *ACFUP*, 6 (Palermo, 1987), Introduction, pp. XLVII and LI.



## PALERMO AS AN ISLAMIC METROPOLIS (11TH CENTURY)

The gradual Islamic conquest of Sicily in the course of the 9th century had initially had the effect of jeopardising its network of traditional trading links in the Mediterranean, of which Syracuse, the island's Byzantine capital, and the Sicilian cities on the east coast, represented one pole, Constantinople and the eastern Mediterranean the other. While Syracuse resisted the assaults of the Muslim invaders for the best part of fifty years, these latter chose Palermo as the island's new capital, it being less exposed to possible attempts at Byzantine reconquest, which were in fact principally directed at the eastern coast of Sicily. The decision to make Palermo the main centre of the island had the effect of shifting medieval Sicily's centre of gravity towards the western Mediterranean. From the 10th century onwards, archaeological evidence points to the expansion of Sicilian trade both on the western and southern shores of the Muslim Mediterranean and on the northern shores of the same sea under Christian rule. More particularly, one of the first indicators of this upturn and redefinition of the trade network is represented by the presence in various localities in Tunisia, Sardinia, Campania, Liguria and Provence of amphoras made in Palermo and used to transport foodstuffs (dried legumes, cereals, dried fruit, sugar, salted fish).<sup>2</sup>

In Muslim Sicily Palermo appeared to be a great city, a metropolis. According to the description from around 985 of the geographer al-Muqaddasī, who had himself in fact never visited but relied rather on earlier sources, apart from the palaces, the numerous markets, the imposing walls and the fertile orchards, Palermo's signal advantage lay in its great port, which, as the original Greek name of the city indicates, was its most characteristic feature.<sup>3</sup> According to this same Arab source, Palermo was then larger than Fustat (old Cairo), from which we may conclude that the Sicilian metropolis was on a grander scale than any other Christian city at that epoch, excepting Constantinople. Ibn Ḥawqal, a merchant and traveller from Baghdad, who reached Palermo in 973, was however somewhat less enthusiastic about the city. He was nonetheless struck by the number

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<sup>2</sup> Fabiola Ardizzone, "Nuove ipotesi a partire dai dati archeologici: la Sicilia occidentale," in Annliese Nef and Vivien Prigent, eds., *La Sicile de Byzance à l'Islam* (Paris, 2010), pp. 61–62.

<sup>3</sup> *Descriptio imperii moslemici / auctore Schamso'd-dîn Abû Abdollâh Mohammed ibn Ahmed ibn Abî Bekr al-Bannâ al-Basschârî al-Mokaddasi*, ed. Michael J. de Goeje (Leiden, 1877), p. 231.

and variety of its markets, and by the great abundance of local products and manufactured goods, but judged the city to be provincial, lacking in culture, filthy and in religious terms aberrant.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the intensely polemical nature of his judgements on Sicilians and on Sicily as a whole makes it hard to assess the value of his testimony for the purposes of historical reconstruction. The fact remains that the most flattering descriptions of Palermo by Arabo-muslim authors, for example those of al-Idrīsī e Ibn Jubayr, date from the Norman epoch.<sup>5</sup>

Palermo, as the capital city of those who had recently seized control of the island, now prevailed in the trade with the Islamic Mediterranean, and when, after the definitive fall, in 962, of Taormina, the Islamic conquest of Sicily was almost complete, the cities of eastern Sicily, which depended above all upon Byzantium for the volume of their traffic, would find themselves overtaken by Palermo in the new geopolitical context.<sup>6</sup> So important was Palermo that in the commercial correspondence discovered in the Cairo Geniza the Jewish merchants who traded between Sicily and the rest of the Muslim Mediterranean tended to identify the city with the island, calling it Madīnat al-Ṣiqilliyya, the (capital) city of Sicily, or even simply al-Madīna, the city, or Ṣiqilliyya. For its Arabic-speaking inhabitants Palermo would continue to be al-Madīna up until the end of the Norman epoch, whereas its growing immigrant population preferred to call it *Panormos*, a vulgarized version of the Greek name for the city.<sup>7</sup>

As for exports, while the archaeological evidence cited above places the emphasis upon foodstuffs, Ibn Ḥawqal indicates that at the end of the 10th century Sicily exported not only grain, wine and sugar<sup>8</sup> but also wool and high quality linen garments. Nonetheless, the island had to import from the outside world many other products which it wholly lacked, and this despite the character of the Sicilians, who were, according to this same

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<sup>4</sup> Ibn Ḥawqal, *BAS* it., 1: 10–27; Id., *Opus geographicum*, ed. Johannes H. Kramers (Leiden, 1938–39), pp. 126–27. See also Alex Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy* (Edinburgh, 2009), p. 63.

<sup>5</sup> Adalgisa De Simone, “Palermo nei geografi e viaggiatori arabi nel Medioevo,” *Studi magrebini* 2 (1968), p. 149.

<sup>6</sup> Illuminato Peri, *Uomini, città e campagne in Sicilia dall’XI al XIII secolo* (Bari, 1978), pp. 3–4.

<sup>7</sup> Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr*, ed. William Wright, text revised by Michael J. de Goeje (Leiden, 1907), p. 324; Id., *Voyages*, trad. M. Gaudefroy-Demombynes, First part (Paris, 1949), p. 379.

<sup>8</sup> On sugar in medieval Palermo, see in particular Mohamed Ouerfelli, *Le sucre. Production, commercialisation et usages dans la Méditerranée médiévale* (Leiden-Boston, 2008), *passim*; as regards the Islamic and Norman epochs, see *ibid.*, pp. 149–54.

author, none too sociable or at their ease in dealing with foreigners.<sup>9</sup> Proceeding now to the 11th century, the documents from the Cairo Geniza, if we accept the interpretation of certain scholars, suggest that silk fabrics (which Ibn Ḥawqal in the 10th century had not even mentioned) and leather goods were then the leading exports, since they were expressly cited as products of Sicilian manufactories;<sup>10</sup> other scholars, on the basis of these same documents, maintain that, alongside foodstuffs, raw, semi-finished materials such as raw silk and hides were the key exports.<sup>11</sup> If manufacturing for export really had the importance in the Islamic epoch attributed to it by the historiography, we ought to shift to the end of that epoch the beginning of a long downturn in the Sicilian economy, which shifted from such developed activities for export to a quantitatively more modest production under the Normans, sustained mainly by the internal market, and, finally, to the atrophying of the Sicilian manufactories in the ensuing epochs, when the inhabitants devoted themselves to the extensive cultivation of agricultural products for export.

Whatever the most important items for export through the external Sicilian trade may have been, the quarter dinar, coined in the Palermitan mint, had become from the 10th century onwards a coin readily accepted in international transactions,<sup>12</sup> and examples dateable to the beginning of that same century have been found at Amalfi, which maintained close commercial ties with Palermo,<sup>13</sup> and at other localities on the southern Tyrrhenian. In the mid-11th century Egypt maintained an intense trade with the Sicilian capital, a fact borne out by an expedition of 10 ships reaching Alexandria from Palermo carrying as many as 5000 passengers.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibn Ḥawqal, *Opus geographicum*, pp. 130–31; see also Francesco Gabrieli, "Ibn Hawqal e gli Arabi di Sicilia", *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 36 (1961), pp. 250–51.

<sup>10</sup> Shlomo D. Goitein, "Sicily and Southern Italy in the Cairo Geniza Documents," *Archivio storico per la Sicilia orientale* 67 (1971), pp. 10–16; David Jacoby, "Seta e tessuti di seta nella Sicilia araba e normanna: il contesto economico," in Maria Andaloro, ed., *Nobiles Officinae. Perle, filigrane e trame di seta dal Palazzo Reale di Palermo* (Palermo, 2006), 2, p. 134.

<sup>11</sup> David Abulafia, *The Two Italies. Economic Relations between the Norman Kingdom of Sicily and the Northern Communes* (Cambridge, 1977), p. 47; Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy*, p. 65.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 63–64.

<sup>13</sup> Goitein, "Sicily and Southern Italy," p. 12.

<sup>14</sup> Shlomo D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society. The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza, I. Economic Foundations* (Berkeley-Los Angeles-London, 1967), p. 215.

## PALERMO AS A NORMAN CAPITAL (11TH–12TH CENTURY)

According to the explicit testimony of Geoffrey Malaterra, the Norman siege of Palermo ended with its surrender but without the customary bloodbath, the Palermitans having prematurely, and indeed, successfully, entreated Duke Robert Guiscard and his brother Roger not only to spare their lives but also to grant them the right to maintain their own forms of worship, to apply their own laws and to refer to their own courts.<sup>15</sup> This would seem to be an important detail for the subsequent history of the city and, indeed, of the island,<sup>16</sup> which in the Norman epoch was characterised by continuity in various respects. The religious particularity of the defeated would be measured, from then onwards, through the payment of the *jizya*, the poll tax indicating the juridical status of each individual who paid.

Having already become the capital of the Norman state after the death of Roger I, under the regency of his third wife, Adelaide del Vasto, Palermo would long continue to be a city with a large Muslim population. The failure of historians to uncover any notarial deeds in Latin prior to the end of the 12th century<sup>17</sup> implies that the city's Latinization in the aftermath of the Norman conquest was very slow and not imposed from above, but due to the simple fact that the number of inhabitants coming from outside and speaking Romance languages was constantly increasing. Among the latter we should note in particular the new prelates to whom the royal authorities entrusted from the outset the capital's spiritual—and in some cases administrative—government. Some of these prelates were of ultramontane origin, men such as Peter of Blois and Étienne du Perche, who reinforced the Court of Palermo's links with the Northern France and the England of the Plantagenets.<sup>18</sup> However, in the middle and lower echelons

<sup>15</sup> Gaufredus Malaterra, *De rebus gestis Rogerii Calabriae et Siciliae Comitis et Roberti Guiscardi Ducis fratris eius*, ed. Ernesto Pontieri, RIS V/1 (Bologna, 1928), p. 53; see Julia Becker, *Graf Roger I. von Sizilien: Wegbereiter des normannischen Königreichs* (Tübingen, 2008), p. 60.

<sup>16</sup> Vera von Falkenhausen, "Aspetti storico-economici dell'età di Roberto il Guiscardo," in *Roberto il Guiscardo e il suo tempo, Atti delle prime giornate normanno-sveve (Bari, maggio 1973)* (Rome, 1975), pp. 127–28.

<sup>17</sup> Ead., "I gruppi etnici nel regno di Ruggero II e la loro partecipazione al potere," in *Società, potere e popolo nell'età di Ruggero II, Atti delle terze giornate normanno-sveve (Bari 23–25 maggio 1977)* (Bari, 1979), p. 145.

<sup>18</sup> Glauco M. Cantarella, "Nel Regno del Sole. Falcando tra Inglesi e Normanni," in Berardo Pio, ed., *Scritti di storia medievale offerti a Maria Consiglia De Matteis* (Spoleto, 2011), pp. 91–120.

of the bureaucracy, Palermitan judges, notaries and clerks using Greek and Arabic continued for many years to come to practice professionally within an administrative system established in pre-Norman times.<sup>19</sup>

Where the Palermitan economy was concerned, some scholars reckon that the general preservation of the social structures that had existed prior to the conquest was nonetheless accompanied by a gradual increase in agricultural activities, to the detriment of artisanal ones, and by a measure of ruralization of certain zones of the city,<sup>20</sup> with a notable demographic contraction at the end of the 12th century.<sup>21</sup> The Palermo arsenal, already rivalled by the one in Messina, did in the end yield, in the mid-12th century, to the latter, which then became the island's principal naval shipyard for the construction and repair of the royal fleet, owing to the presence near Messina of iron mines and of plentiful supplies of timber in the forests of Etna.<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, the 12th century marked the moment at which the foreign merchant communities, thanks to their endorsement by the Norman monarchy, overtook the Palermitan and Sicilian merchant class in the sphere of long-distance trade in local products.<sup>23</sup> This development was reflected in documents from the Cairo Geniza, where, precisely from the 12th century, the Sicilian Jewish merchants seemed to be less and less involved in the trade with Sicily, just as the owners of the cargo ships no longer appeared to be Muslims from the island, as they still had been in the 11th century.<sup>24</sup> Under the Norman monarchy Sicilian trade with the outside world therefore gradually assumed certain characteristics familiar to us from its subsequent history. On the one hand, this trade was closely supervised by the political authorities, who were all too aware of its value to them—in the guise of customs tolls—as a financial resource, but on the other hand the Sicilian markets had been conquered by communities of foreign shipowners and merchants powerful and organized enough

<sup>19</sup> Falkenhausen, "I gruppi etnici," pp. 140–41 and note 37.

<sup>20</sup> Giuseppe Galasso, *Dal comune medievale all'Unità. Linee di storia meridionale* (Bari, 1969), pp. 55–56.

<sup>21</sup> Cesare De Seta, Leonardo Di Mauro, *Palermo* (Bari, 1980), p. 40; Illuminato Peri, "Il porto di Palermo dagli arabi agli aragonesi," *Economia e storia* 4 (1958), p. 442.

<sup>22</sup> Peri, *Uomini, città*, p. 17.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>24</sup> Annliese Nef, "La Sicile dans la documentation de la Geniza cairote (fin X<sup>e</sup>–XIII siècle): les réseaux attestés et leur nature," in Damien Coulon, Christophe Picard and Dominique Valérian, eds., *Espaces et Réseaux en Méditerranée VI<sup>e</sup>–XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle, I. La configuration des réseaux* (Paris, 2007), pp. 279; 287.

to be able to guarantee the purchase and transport of huge quantities of foodstuffs and manufactured goods to vast external markets.<sup>25</sup>

The oldest foreign merchant community, already present in Palermo from the end of the 10th century, was composed of Amalfitans, who had settled in the old Amalfitania, up against the Palermitan quarter of the Cassaro. A lively account of this *vicus Amalphitanorum* may be found in the Epistle to Peter the Treasurer attributed to Ugo Falcando.<sup>26</sup> In the final period of Muslim domination Palermo was also, however, much frequented by Pisan merchants, as Goffredo Malaterra attests.<sup>27</sup> In the 12th century Pisans and Genoese prevailed over the Amalfitans in the Palermitan market-place. Exported products then came from agriculture and animal husbandry, such as wheat, oil, cane sugar, cheese, raw silk and cotton. There was also local production in cotton or silk cloths, objects in glass, ivory and carved coral, manufactured goods normally associated with the luxury of the Norman Court. We know of the existence of factories adjoining the royal palace of Palermo, which traditionally specialized in the art of embroidering silk inherited from the Arab epoch, a famous example of which is the ceremonial mantle of Roger II, on which it is possible to make out a lengthy inscription embroidered in Arabic recording the place where it was made, and the date, 1133–34.<sup>28</sup> From 1147 there is also documentary evidence for the production in these same royal factories of precious silk cloths, described in their prodigious lavishness no later than 1190 in the already cited letter attributed to Ugo Falcando.<sup>29</sup> The high manufacturing capacities of the Norman epoch, particularly as regards the production of silk cloths, have however been disputed by Stephan Epstein, who maintains that the Sicilian silk industry was essentially concentrated in eastern Sicily alone, and, in marked contrast to conventional historiographical wisdom, defers its birth to as late as the 13th century.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Peri, "Il porto di Palermo," pp. 455–56; Henri Bresc, "Reti di scambio locale e inter-regionale nell'Italia dell'alto Medioevo," in Ruggiero Romano and Ugo Tucci, eds., *Storia d'Italia*, VI, *Economia naturale, economia monetaria* (Turin, 1983), p. 164.

<sup>26</sup> Hugo Falcandus, *Epistola ad Petrum panormitane Ecclesie thesaurarium de calamitate Sicilie*, ed. Giovan Battista Siragusa, FSI, XXII (Rome, 1897), p. 183.

<sup>27</sup> Gaufredus Malaterra, *De rebus gestis*, p. 45.

<sup>28</sup> Jeremy Johns, "Le iscrizioni e le epigrafi in arabo. Una rilettura," in *Nobiles Officinae*, pp. 53–55; Rotraud Bauer, "Il manto di Ruggero II e le vesti regie," *ibid.*, pp. 171–73; Jacoby, "Seta e tessuti," *ibid.*, pp. 135–36.

<sup>29</sup> Hugo Falcandus, *Epistola ad Petrum*, pp. 178–80; Bauer, "Il manto di Ruggero II e le vesti regie," pp. 172–73.

<sup>30</sup> Stephan R. Epstein, *An Island for Itself. Economic Development and social Change in late medieval Sicily* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 201–202.

Indeed, what is at issue is not so much the existence of such manufacturing activities in this epoch as their impact upon the export market, the suggestion being rather that production here was for a restricted internal market.<sup>31</sup> Midway through the 12th century, when fully in the Norman epoch, at any rate where trade with Liguria was concerned, the export of foodstuffs and of Sicilian semi-finished materials loomed larger, as the Siculo-Genoese trade agreements of 1156 would suggest. To judge by these trade agreements, grain and the raw materials for textiles such as cotton and silk, as against finished products, represented the bulk of the exports to the north-west Mediterranean,<sup>32</sup> in particular the raw cotton produced at Girgenti and Mazara and the wool and lambs' hides dispatched to Genoa from the port of Palermo.<sup>33</sup> Liguria in its entirety, from Savona to Ventimiglia, was the destination for Sicilian products, since the trade agreements of 1156 clearly stipulate that the favourable clauses they contained applied to all Ligurians "*scilicet habitantes in maritima a Vicimilio usque Portum Veneris,*" whereas the principal Sicilian terminus for exchanges with the northern Tyrrhenian was Palermo itself, as is evident from the cartulary of the Genoese notary Giovanni Scriba, with documents relating to the decade 1154–64.<sup>34</sup>

The growing importance of trade links with Genoa and Liguria, set in motion through earlier accords in 1116 and in 1127–28 and reinforced by the abovementioned agreements of 1156, had also had some impact upon the make-up of the population in the Palermitan hinterland and on the dynastic ties of the Norman royal family, which, by contrast with the sovereigns from subsequent dynasties, maintained a permanent Court in Palermo. Roger I, as I have already indicated, was married, a third time, to Adelaide del Vasto, who belonged to the powerful family of the Margraves of Savona, the Aleramici. He had then endowed her brother, Enrico, with vast feudal estates in eastern Sicily, which would be settled by people from the Liguro-Piedmontese marquisate, by those "Lombard" (that is,

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<sup>31</sup> In particular, the royal textile workshops, with personnel who might even have been taken by force to Palermo from other centres of production, such as Thebes and Corinth in Greece, would have worked exclusively for the Norman court, and the elite associated with it, see Bresc, "Reti di scambio," pp. 166–67; Peri, "Il porto di Palermo," p. 451.

<sup>32</sup> Abulafia, *The Two Italies*, pp. 47–48; 93.

<sup>33</sup> Bresc, "Reti di scambio," p. 163.

<sup>34</sup> Geo Pistarino, "Commercio e comunicazioni tra Genova ed il Regno normanno-svevo all'epoca dei due Guglielmi," in *Potere, società e popolo nell'età dei due Guglielmi, Atti delle quarte giornate normanno-sveve (Bari—Gioia del Colle, 8–10 ottobre 1979)* (Bari, 1981), p. 248.

northern Italian) settlers who played so large a part in the Latinization of the Sicilian hinterland, to the detriment of the long-established Muslim communities.<sup>35</sup>

This process was briefly halted in the second half of the 12th century, when Genoa and Pisa finally yielded, in 1162, despite strong internal opposition, to the anti-Norman proposals of Frederick I Barbarossa, and signed agreements with the Emperor which granted them many concessions in Sicily, once the Kingdom had been wrested from the Normans.<sup>36</sup> Genoese trade with Sicily was then interrupted, albeit not entirely, with the result that merchant groups originating in the Norman kingdom, especially from Campania,<sup>37</sup> occupied some of the spaces vacated by the Genoese. Even the Venetians now found in Palermo itself a sphere of activity which up until then had been none too accessible to them,<sup>38</sup> though they were holders since 1144 of a royal diploma granting them the right to rebuild, as their national church, a ruined church in the Seralcadi, which was promptly dedicated to St. Mark.<sup>39</sup> However, Pisa had already made its peace in 1169 with the Kingdom of Sicily, as did Genoa in 1174, with the latter obtaining a renewal of the privileges formerly enjoyed under William I.<sup>40</sup> The accords between the Doge of Venice, Sebastiano Ziani, and King William II date, for their part, from 1175; amongst other things, they slashed the taxes on the import and export of goods into and from the ports of Palermo and Messina previously paid by the Venetians under Roger II and William I.<sup>41</sup>

The Palermo of the second half of the 12th century in the meantime displayed the most splendid products of Arabo-Norman artistic achievement. As I have already noted, the most enthusiastic descriptions of the city furnished by Arab visitors date back to this same epoch. Shortly before the

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<sup>35</sup> Henri Bresc, *Un monde méditerranéen. Économie et société en Sicile 1300–1450* (Palermo, 1986), pp. 594–95; Alex Metcalfe, “The Muslims of Sicily under Christian Rule,” in Graham A. Loud and Alex Metcalfe, eds., *The Society of Norman Italy* (Leiden-Boston-Köln, 2002), p. 314.

<sup>36</sup> *I Libri Iurium della Repubblica di Genova*, I/2, ed. Dino Puncuh, *Fonti per la storia della Liguria*, IV (Genoa, 1996), n. 285 (Pavia, 9 June 1162).

<sup>37</sup> Abulafia, *The Two Italies*, p. 131.

<sup>38</sup> Bresc, “Reti di scambio,” p. 162, note 5.

<sup>39</sup> Carlo A. Garufi, *I documenti inediti dell'epoca normanna in Sicilia* (Palermo, 1899), pp. 44, n. 18 (February 1144); Abulafia, *The Two Italies*, pp. 79; 135.

<sup>40</sup> *I Libri Iurium*, I/2, n. 291 (Palermo, November 1174).

<sup>41</sup> Gottlieb L. Fr. Tafel and Georg M. Thomas, eds, *Urkunden zur älteren Handels- und Staatsgeschichte der Republik Venedig mit besonderer Beziehung auf Byzanz und die Levante*, I (*Fontes rerum austriacarum. Diplomata et Acta*, XII) (Vienna, 1856), reprinted 1964, LXV–LXVI, pp. 172–75.



death of King Roger II (26 February 1154), al-Idrīsī exalted the still largely oriental aspect of the Cassaro, describing its dense and magnificent complex of tall buildings, baths and mosques grouped in an ascending multitude of buildings crowned by the royal palace.<sup>42</sup> Likewise Ibn Jubayr, when passing through Palermo in 1184–85, greatly admired the buildings and the mosques but also churches such as Santa Maria dell’Ammiraglio, the royal palace and the urbanistic system of the city, all splendours meriting, according to him, comparison with the beauty of Cordoba, once a Christian city and still in his day belonging to Islam.<sup>43</sup> Within this setting of luxurious exoticism, of flamboyant architectural syncretism,<sup>44</sup> the Latinization of Palermitan society was nevertheless proceeding apace, as these same Arabo-muslim travellers realised, and the spaces amenable to intercultural and interconfessional dialogue were shrinking just as rapidly:<sup>45</sup> the “Court party,” composed not only of Latin clerics but also of prominent Palermitan Muslims and of eunuchs from the Maghreb, recently Christianized,<sup>46</sup> upon whom the king relied for the administration of the Kingdom and for counsel,<sup>47</sup> was ever more isolated from the riotous feudal nobility and their followers, as the trial and execution of Admiral Phillip of Mahdiya at the end of Roger II’s reign would prove.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, contemporaries themselves felt that the royal palace had always been a centre for the elaboration of a policy of cultural syncretism which was then disseminated in urban society, but in the transfer of power from Roger II to William I external resistance to such a policy for the first time

<sup>42</sup> Al-Idrīsī, *BAS* it., 1: 61–62.

<sup>43</sup> Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels*, p. 331; Id., *Voyages*, pp. 387–91.

<sup>44</sup> Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Sicily*, pp. 301–302.

<sup>45</sup> Laura Sciascia, “Palermo e il mare,” in Giosuè Musca, ed., *Itinerari e centri urbani nel Mezzogiorno normanno-svevo, Atti delle decime giornate normanno-sveve (Bari, 21–24 ottobre 1991)* (Bari, 1993), p. 63.

<sup>46</sup> Falkenhausen, “I gruppi etnici,” p. 153 and notes 103–104; Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Sicily*, pp. 303–305; Joshua C. Birk, *Sicilian Counterpoint: Power and Pluralism in Norman Sicily*, Ph. D. University of Santa Barbara, 2006, pp. 113–14; Annliese Nef, *Conquérir et gouverner la Sicile islamique aux XI<sup>e</sup> et XII<sup>e</sup> siècles*, Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises d’Athènes et de Rome, 346 (Rome, 2011), pp. 340–42.

<sup>47</sup> It was indeed the early concern of the Norman dynasty of the Altavilla to avail themselves of the Arab administrative personnel for the fiscal management of the future Kingdom which led to Palermo, the fulcrum of Sicilian Arabism, being chosen as the capital, rather than Messina, see Henri Bresc, “*In ruga que arabice dicitur zucac...*”: les rues de Palerme (1070–1460), in Id., *Politique et société en Sicile, XII<sup>e</sup>–XV<sup>e</sup> siècles*, Variorum Reprints (Aldershot, 1990), p. 155.

<sup>48</sup> Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Sicily*, pp. 305–306; Salvatore Tramontana, “Palermo dai Normanni al Vespro,” in *Storia di Palermo*, III (Palermo, 2003), p. 32.

must have combined with a crisis within the palace, if it is true that at the end of his life Roger II “*secularibus negociis aliquantulum postpositis et omissis, Judeos et Sarracenos ad fidem Christi convertere modis omnibus laborabat et conversis dona plurima et necessaria conferebat.*”<sup>49</sup> A still graver episode saw a baronial revolt against William I, which cost Admiral Maio his life in 1160 and involved the sack of the royal palace, the destruction of the cadastre, the ransacking of Muslims’ city houses and their expulsion from the Cassaro in 1161. According to Ugo Falcando, at this date the Palermitan Saracens were primarily involved in trade and in serving their sovereign as collectors of customs tolls.<sup>50</sup> Although the King’s suppression of the insurgents had enabled various Muslims in the Court party to take their revenge against those who had attacked them or who had threatened to do so,<sup>51</sup> it was nonetheless from this date that records suggest a demographic contraction and economic marginalization of the Muslim mercantile and artisanal class, leaving a void that foreign merchant groups already active in the city were destined to fill.<sup>52</sup> Such changes were of course slow to have an impact. Indeed, when Benjamin of Tudela visited Palermo between 1170 and 1173, though he had clearly sensed the threatening atmosphere that weighed upon the Jewish and Muslim communities, he was still at pains to emphasise their commercial dynamism.<sup>53</sup> A decade later, according to Ibn Jubayr’s summary, the mosques in Palermo were still numerous, but there was no solidarity between the Muslim elite at Court and the disinherited majority of Muslim small artisans and peasants from the hinterland, who were increasingly exposed to the temptation of an easy conversion to Christianity, and with it the promise of a better life.<sup>54</sup> After the death of William II, which was followed by a dispute over the succession, there were further massacres and destruction of Muslim

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<sup>49</sup> Romualdus Salernitanus, *Chronicon*, ed. Carlo Alberto Garufi, RIS 7 (Città di Castello, 1914–35), p. 236; see also Mario Gallina, “Dominazioni costruite, dominazioni percepite: l’urbanistica palermitana dei secoli X–XII tra architetture arabe e normanne,” paper given in the context of the conference *Identità cittadine e aggregazioni sociali in Italia. Secoli XI–XV* (Trieste, 28–30 June 2010), forthcoming.

<sup>50</sup> Ugo Falcando, *Il Regno di Sicilia*, ed. Vito Lo Curto (Cassino, 2007), p. 131; Id., *La historia o liber de Regno Sicilie*, ed. Giovan Battista Siragusa, FSI 22, (Rome, 1897), p. 57.

<sup>51</sup> Falcando, *Il Regno*, pp. 170–75; 184–87; Id., *Liber de Regno*, pp. 79–80; 85–86.

<sup>52</sup> Peri, “Il porto di Palermo,” pp. 444, 449; Tramontana, “Palermo dai Normanni,” pp. 33–34.

<sup>53</sup> Beniamino da Tudela, *Libro di viaggi*, ed. Laura Minervini (Palermo, 1989), p. 82.

<sup>54</sup> Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels*, p. 332; Id., *Voyages*, pp. 389–90; Sciascia, “Palermo e il mare,” p. 63.

houses and property, within Palermo and beyond it, razing to the ground the countless *casali* which dotted the Palermitan hinterland and guaranteed its agricultural wealth, and causing thousands of Muslims to flee to the mountains or to quit the island and settle in North Africa.<sup>55</sup>

PALERMO AS A TRADING CITY BETWEEN THE ANGEVINS AND THE  
ARAGONESE (13TH–14TH CENTURY)

According to the conventional historiographical wisdom, which regards the manufacturing production of the Norman epoch as still important for Sicilian overseas trade, at the time of King William I and King William II, and paralleling the gradual destruction of Sicily's Muslim community, there was triggered that economic downturn which transformed the island from being a country exporting not only foodstuffs but also semi-finished articles and some prestige finished products into a country of extensive agriculture for export, above all wheat and barley and also, after a long eclipse, sugar cane.<sup>56</sup> During the reign of Frederick II of Swabia the shift from the first to the second economic system is held to have accelerated. On the one hand, the new ruler sought a radical solution to the problem of Sicily, and Palermo, and the failure to achieve peaceful cohabitation with the local Muslim communities, by deporting the latter to Lucera, in Apulia. On the other hand, he endeavoured, unsuccessfully, through his invitation in 1239 to certain Jewish communities from the Maghreb to settle in the Palermitan Conca d'Oro, to relaunch cultivation of sugar cane and of plants used in dyeing, along with the rearing of silkworms, activities upon which Sicilian manufacturing activity in the Islamic and Norman epochs had been based.<sup>57</sup> A large part of the Palermitan quarter of the Seralcadi—at one time the centre of the above productive activities and inhabited by the city's last Saracens, the descendants of those who had been driven out of the Cassaro in 1161—was depopulated as a result of the Frederician deportations.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Ferdinando Maurici, *L'Emirato sulle montagne* (Palermo, 1987), pp. 34–35.

<sup>56</sup> Ouerfelli, *Le sucre*, pp. 154–55.

<sup>57</sup> Jean-Louis-Alphonse Huillard-Bréholles, ed., *Historia diplomatia Friderici secundi*, V, Paris, 1857, pp. 595–97; Giuseppe Mandalà, "La migration des juifs du Garbum en Sicile (1239)," in Benoît Grévin, ed., *Maghreb-Italie. Des passeurs médiévaux à l'orientalisme moderne (XIII<sup>e</sup>-milieu XX<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, Collection de l'École française de Rome, 439 (Rome, 2010), pp. 19–48.

<sup>58</sup> Peri, "Il porto di Palermo," pp. 431–32.

Conversely, the eastern sector of the Seralcadi and the adjacent area subsequently called the Porta dei Patitelli, midway between the Seralcadi and the Kalsa, behind the port, would from the 12th century onwards begin their rise to prominence, thanks to the activity of foreign merchants and shipowners. The first such foreigners to settle were the Amalfitans, who built their church there, dedicated to St. Andrea. The area later encompassed the arsenal to the north, the church of S. Domenico to the west, the "via dei Catalani" to the south and the church of S. Francesco to the east. In the port there were ships laden with cereals, bound for Pisa, Genoa and Marseilles and bringing back textiles on the return voyage, as well as useful metals such as copper and tin from northern Europe and iron from the island of Elba. Changes in the built environment reflect fairly faithfully the impact of this trade and its protagonists upon the urban area in question. The Amalfitans, who by the first decades of the 14th century were already an integral part of the city aristocracy, turned out to favour financial activities such as the leasing of tolls and gabelles<sup>59</sup> (consider, for example, the case of the Pulcaro, Pando, Cisario and Afflitto families). The Pisans, for their part, stationed along their *ruga Pisanorum*, and the Florentines, clustered around the church of S. Francesco, had got the upper hand in trade. For the Tuscans in general gave every sign of possessing the financial acumen needed to organise large-scale commercial ventures, being able to advance considerable sums against the sale of foodstuffs, to lease public offices associated with Sicilian overseas trade and to make loans to the Crown, until the day came when, having built up a substantial seigneurial inheritance, they chose to follow the path taken by the Amalfitans and to swell the ranks of the Palermitan patriciate.<sup>60</sup> These merchant communities, joined latterly by those from Marseilles and from Catalonia, were in large part responsible for the renewal of the built environment in the lower city, constructing in the commercial quarter progressively larger and more opulent buildings in which to conduct their affairs, the merchant lodges, and playing their part in the gradual transfer into that same quarter of the government offices associated with overseas trade, such as the Customs House, once upon a time located in the Cassaro.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Henri Bresc, "Mort aux Angevins!", in Henri Bresc and Geneviève Bresc-Bautier, eds., *Palerme 1070-1492. Mosaïque de peuples, nation rebelle: la naissance violente de l'identité sicilienne* (Paris, 1993), pp. 122-23.

<sup>60</sup> Pietro Corrao, "Uomini d'affari stranieri nelle città siciliane nel tardo medioevo," *Revista de historia medieval*, 11 (2000), pp. 143-46.

<sup>61</sup> Bresc, "Les rues de Palerme," pp. 165-67.

If Palermo still retained its pre-eminence as a great Mediterranean port, it was not so much on account of the volume of trade, in which respect it was at times overtaken by Messina, but through the fact of being the centre that representatives of the foreign merchant communities frequented the most, so that it almost ended up playing the role, as Pietro Corrao has claimed, of a “decompression chamber” for exchanges between local products and imported goods.<sup>62</sup> By the same token, all those legal and financial operations necessary to the existence of the complex forms of trade in which the Tuscans excelled—namely, the partnership contracts between merchants, the surety guarantees, the negotiation of loans and, crucially, the stock exchange for quotations on grains and for bills of exchange, which had to be purchased—took place in Palermo, save when the city was in a state of turmoil.<sup>63</sup>

The winning of the Sicilian Crown by the Capetian prince Charles I of Anjou, who by force of arms had wrested it from the heirs of Frederick II, brought yet other merchant groups to Palermo and to certain other Sicilian cities. These new merchant communities, originally from Marseilles and Provence, devoted themselves to exporting thousands of *salme* of wheat from the Sicilian capital and built their own lodges on plots from the royal demesne offered by the Crown.<sup>64</sup> The Angevin dynasty was not destined to wield authority over Palermo for long, however. One of those episodes of serious urban unrest alluded to above, indeed, the most famous of them, in 1282, gave rise to the revolt against the Angevins and to the detaching of Sicily from southern Italy, under the sovereignty of another dynasty, founded by the second-born son of the King of Aragon and Count of Barcelona, which reigned over Sicily for almost the entire 14th century. The origins of the Vespers are indubitably complex and none too easy to interpret, and here I will simply emphasise that Palermo itself was the theatre in which the unthinkable cruel first act was performed, involving the massacre of all individuals of French or Provençal origin then in the city whom the mob succeeded in laying their hands upon.<sup>65</sup> The Aragonese

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<sup>62</sup> Pietro Corrao, “Mercanti stranieri e regno di Sicilia: sistema di protezioni e modalità di radicamento nella società cittadina,” in Mario Del Treppo, ed., *Sistema di rapporti ed élites economiche in Europa (secoli XII–XVII)* (Naples, 1994), pp. 100–101.

<sup>63</sup> Bresc, *Un monde méditerranéen*, p. 401.

<sup>64</sup> See *I registri della cancelleria angioina ricostruiti da Riccardo Filangieri con la collaborazione degli archivisti napoletani*, Testi e documenti di storia napoletana, XIII, registro LXX, nn. 128–129 (18 November 1275).

<sup>65</sup> Salvatore Tramontana, *Gli anni del Vespro. L'immaginario, la cronaca, la storia* (Bari, 1989), p. 10 and note 11.

dynasty sought to deprive Sicilian overseas trade of some of its traditional outlets and to steer it towards certain others. Naples and the Guelph republics of Florence and Genoa were removed from the list of legitimate destinations, while closer ties were by contrast forged with Pisa, Catalonia and its dependencies, such as the Balearic islands and Sardinia. In practice, however, only the commercial exchanges with the Angevin Kingdom of Naples were blocked, and then only intermittently, by the latent state of war with Sicily, at any rate up until the Peace of Aversa of 1372. In the other cases, much depended upon the strength of royal authority in Sicily, on the influence of the merchant communities present on the island and on the number of individuals belonging to them who could claim to the local authorities that they had by then become naturalized Sicilians. In fact, in the Palermo of the first half of the fourteenth century the largest merchant community was indeed the Genoese,<sup>66</sup> which, despite the Ligurian Republic's alignment with the Guelph camp, proved able, as we shall see below, to hold its own throughout the Trecento in Aragonese, pro-Ghibelline Sicily. On the other hand, the Vespers, as may readily be understood, had the effect of throwing the Sicilian ports wide open to the Catalan merchant navy, which, owing to the special protection extended to it, came during the first half of the century to account with its own ships for 40% of goods transported through Sicilian overseas trade.<sup>67</sup> Of the various consular networks, the Catalan soon became the most developed, its epicentre being in Palermo, where, in the *ruga Catalanorum*, the largest Catalan consulate on the island might be found. The Aragonese Crown did not make any attempts at mass colonization in Sicily, as it would do in some localities in Sardinia, and for their part the leading actors in the Catalan merchant community were slow to settle permanently in Palermo and to ask for naturalization.<sup>68</sup> After the uprisings of 1346–48 against them, the Catalan merchants, together with others linked to their nation (Valencians, Majorcans) and present in Palermo, began for security's sake to store their goods in the Castello a Mare, where their consul did in fact hold his tribunal.<sup>69</sup> The Catalans, though having in absolute

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<sup>66</sup> Corrao, "Uomini d'affari," p. 148.

<sup>67</sup> Bresc, *Un monde méditerranéen*, p. 526, note 16; David Abulafia, "Catalan Merchants and the Western Mediterranean, 1236–1300: Studies in the Notarial Acts of Barcelona and Sicily," *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 16 (1985), pp. 232–42.

<sup>68</sup> Bresc, *Un monde méditerranéen*, pp. 419–21; Corrao, "Mercanti stranieri," p. 97.

<sup>69</sup> Corrao, "Uomini d'affari," pp. 147–48.

terms the most ships in the port of Palermo between 1298 and 1339, were then completely outstripped by the Genoese.

Indeed, an east-west split of Sicilian production and trade was just then under way, as became quite obvious in the latter half of the century, when Genoese merchants prevailed in Palermo and in western Sicily, while the Catalans concentrated upon Catania and eastern Sicily, both communities leaving little room to Pisans and Florentines,<sup>70</sup> who were superior in commercial and banking expertise but lacked a naval force large enough to deal with the volume of their exchanges.<sup>71</sup> The Florentines, labouring under the harshest restrictions in western Sicily, in many cases responded by sending documents to the Palermitan authorities to expedite their own naturalization, except when they were representatives of banking societies which had been granted special privileges (Acciaiuoli, Bardi, Peruzzi).<sup>72</sup> The Venetians, for their part, were still wholly absent from the port of Palermo, although, as we noted above, they had frequented it in the Norman period; by this date all they did was call in at some ports in south-eastern Sicily on the route which from the Adriatic went to Malta and to Tripoli on the Barbary Coast.<sup>73</sup>

The fracture of Sicilian economic reality and the preponderance of certain merchant groups over all the others was the mirror-image and consequence of the disastrous political situation in which the Kingdom of Sicily, and Palermo in particular, then found itself, being prey to a civil war between feudal factions, which, in order to differentiate themselves one from the other, had adopted an ethnic label. Thus, the "Catalan" faction, led by the Alagona family, was in dispute with the "Latin" or "Italian" faction, captained by the mighty Chiaromonte and Ventimiglia families. The young King Louis of Sicily, having fallen under the influence of the Catalan party, in 1353 when in Catania ended up sending the principal representatives of the Chiaromonte family into exile, while the latter, in their turn, also in part because of the famine that was then ravaging Palermo,<sup>74</sup> did not scruple, with the support of a good part of the population

<sup>70</sup> Epstein, *An Island for Itself*, p. 92.

<sup>71</sup> Bresc, *Un monde méditerranéen*, pp. 282–83.

<sup>72</sup> David Abulafia, "Southern Italy and the Florentine Economy, 1265–1370," *The Economic History Review*, second series, 34/3 (1981), pp. 386–87 and note 53.

<sup>73</sup> David Abulafia, "Venice and the Kingdom of Naples in the Last Years of Robert the Wise, 1332–1343," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 48 (1980), p. 193; Bresc, *Un monde méditerranéen*, p. 283.

<sup>74</sup> Salvatore Tramontana, *Michele da Piazza e il potere baronale in Sicilia* (Messina-Florence, 1963), p. 265 and note 4.

of Sicily, to call upon the hated Angevins of Naples to reconquer the island and, above all, to restock Palermo with supplies.<sup>75</sup> The Palermitans backed these plans, and sent messengers to Louis of Taranto, husband of Queen Joan I of Naples, to negotiate the hand-over of the city to the Angevins. For this they were roundly rebuked by the pro-Catalan faction, which remembered the city's glorious past, epitomised by the Vespers.<sup>76</sup> Michele da Piazza described a Palermo now bereft of traffic and trade, culturally depressed, with derelict buildings and monuments and in so parlous a state that even the appearance of its noblewomen had suffered<sup>77</sup> and recounted the rapturous greeting the city gave in April 1354 to the seneschal of the Kingdom of Naples, Acciaiuoli, and to its four galleys laden with supplies, with the seneschal promptly repaying the compliment by distributing foodstuffs to the city's inhabitants.<sup>78</sup> With Palermo under Angevin control (a period that continued until 1357–58), the importing of wheat, on the basis of a decree by Joan I and Louis of Naples of November 1355, was entrusted to a Genoese merchant, who was vested with the right to decide who might be exempted from the relevant tolls. The praetor and judges of the city of Palermo soon took steps against this privilege, which effectively established a monopoly, and acting in unison with the Chiaromonte called upon the Magna Curia to annul it.<sup>79</sup> It is nonetheless hard to conceive just how much the city's condition differed from the Angevin Palermo of 70 years before, when Sicily had been the granary of the Mediterranean and the Sicilian Crown imposed and collected an onerous *ius exiture* from all the merchant communities which exported thousands of *salme* of grain a year from Palermo and the other licensed ports on the island. An agreement reached in 1361 between the Chiaromonte and the new king of Sicily, Frederick IV, Louis' brother, though it did little in the long term to allay the tensions between the Crown and the overweening Palermitan family, did nonetheless have the positive effect of reopening the port of Palermo to international trade.<sup>80</sup> Once again

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<sup>75</sup> Mattheus Palmerius, *Vita Nicolai Acciaiuoli*, ed. Gino Scaramella, RSI XIII (Bologna, 1934), 2: 18; Giovanni Villani, *Nuova cronica*, ed. Giuseppe Porta (Parma, 1991), 3: 155–56.

<sup>76</sup> Michele da Piazza, *Cronaca (1336–1361)*, ed. Antonino Giuffrida, Fonti per la storia della Sicilia, 3 (Palermo, 1980), pp. 200–206.

<sup>77</sup> Michele da Piazza, *Cronaca*, pp. 204–205.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200; Palmerius, *Vita Nicolai*, p. 18.

<sup>79</sup> Patrizia Sardina, *Palermo e i Chiaromonte: splendore e tramonto di una signoria. Potere nobiliare, ceti dirigenti e società tra XIV e XV secolo* (Caltanissetta-Rome, 2003), pp. 38–39; 41.

<sup>80</sup> Bresc, *Un monde méditerranéen*, p. 817.



it was the Chiaromonte who were in a position to decide just whom this reopening should favour and all the more so after the death of Frederick IV in 1377 and the accession to the Sicilian throne of Mary, his sole legitimate daughter but still a minor, and therefore flanked by a "collective vicariate" composed of the most important fief-holders of the Kingdom, in which the Chiaromonte had a role answering to their expectations. Manfredi Chiaromonte, Count of Modica, Admiral of the Kingdom, had close economic ties with the Genoese, not by chance represented in late-14th century Palermo alone by a community of 50–60 merchants,<sup>81</sup> who enjoyed protection even against political upheavals. Thus, when in the spring of 1392 King Martin the Elder of Aragon and his son King Martin the Younger of Sicily wrested control of Palermo and of the island from the fief-holders, they called upon their representatives and subordinates to respect the Genoese merchants and "upright persons" who frequented Palermo, under the protection of the doge of Genoa's ambassador, and this despite their recognizing that there were, indeed, "grounds for enmity" towards the seafaring Republic. Despite these considerations, when the Chiaromontane party's reaction led to the temporary reconquest of Palermo by Enrico Chiaromonte, it was still Genoese merchants who supplied the city besieged by the Aragonese with provisions, thereby infringing the accord entered into with the doge of Genoa in order to isolate the rebels against the royal authority.<sup>82</sup> The long siege of Palermo ended with one quarter of the city being pitted against another: the Albergheria backed the Catalans whereas the Khalsa remained loyal to the "Italian," Chiaromontane party.

Between 1360 and 1400 four Genoese consortia (Ardimento, De Mari, Squarciafico and Spinola) had divided up between them the bulk of the commercial exchanges and banking transactions in Palermo. The city had been flooded with cloths produced in Flanders and imported by the Genoese, whereas every effort had been made to reduce the distribution of Catalan woollens to a minimum.<sup>83</sup> Up until the mid-14th century cotton, linen and silk fabrics were produced locally for export. Attempts were in fact also made to establish a woollen industry, a cloth traditionally lacking in Sicily, by means of the creation in the city, in a palace made available by King Frederick III, of a workshop run by the Lombard religious order of

<sup>81</sup> Corrao, "Mercanti stranieri," p. 88.

<sup>82</sup> Sardina, *Palermo e i Chiaromonte*, pp. 88, 92.

<sup>83</sup> Henri Bresc, "La draperie catalane au miroir sicilien, 1300–1460," *Acta historica et archaeologica mediaevalia* 4 (1983), pp. 108–10.

the Umiliati, whose prowess in the production of woollen cloth was well known.<sup>84</sup> After 1350, however, the urban patriciate's scant enthusiasm for investing in the textile sector, and, crucially, its boycotting by the foreign merchants, who were concerned to retain the dual concept of exchanging imported cloths for foodstuffs and raw materials for weaving, did serious damage to this venerable manufacturing tradition.<sup>85</sup> After the Aragonese reconquest of the island, Catalan woollens, on the other hand, a cheap but at the same time highly prized article, once again flooded into Palermo, where at the beginning of the 15th century they accounted for up to 70% of the market in textiles.<sup>86</sup>

For the whole of the 14th century and the early 15th century, Palermo was the entry port in Sicily not only for imported goods but also for an influx of workers on the land and artisans. These immigrants were attracted to the city by the chronically low rate of population growth in the Sicilian hinterland. They came from the Franco-Provençal area, from the German lands and from the Italian peninsula itself, especially from Campania, once the conclusions to the peace of Aversa with the Angevins had notably enhanced exchanges with the Kingdom of Naples. By contrast with the merchant class, throughout the 15th century these groups of immigrants did not have recourse to institutions such as the church or their national confraternities in order to keep the memory of their own origins alive and merged fairly rapidly with the local population.<sup>87</sup>

#### PALERMO AS A GREAT EMPORIUM UNDER ARAGONESE DOMINATION (END OF THE 14TH CENTURY–MID-15TH CENTURY)

The reconquest of Palermo and of Sicily by the two Martins would not have been possible without the financial subsidies advanced to them by merchants and bankers resident in Palermo who were counting upon the Aragonese reconquest of the island. Foremost among them was the Florentine Giovanni Abbatellis, who maintained close commercial ties with the branches of the Datini company in Majorca and Valencia and with those of the Albertis in Barcelona and also in Valencia.<sup>88</sup> He mainly exported

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<sup>84</sup> Carmelo Trasselli, "Tessuti di lana siciliani a Palermo nel XIV secolo," *Economia e Storia* (1956/3), 303–16.

<sup>85</sup> But Epstein's position, in *An Island to Itself*, pp. 182–210, is more nuanced.

<sup>86</sup> Epstein, *An Island to Itself*, pp. 92–93.

<sup>87</sup> Bresc, *Un monde méditerranéen*, p. 600.

<sup>88</sup> Sardina, *Palermo e i Chiaromonte*, pp. 229–30.

grain and imported cloths, thereby epitomizing the characteristics of late-14th century Palermitan overseas trade, although from the mid-century there was evident a return to the exportation of a more varied basket of agricultural produce, including cotton, salt, sulphur, cheese, salted tuna, sugar and semi-finished leather.

The cultivation and refining of sugar cane had been productive activities in Arabo-Norman Sicily, all technical knowledge of which would seem to have been lost by the beginning of the 13th century. From 1320 onwards, however, there were signs in some Palermitan market gardens of a resumption of the cultivation of cane, and of the production of sugar, though only in a limited number of workshops, the product being sold in apothecaries' shops. After 1370 production assumed the aspect of large-scale manufacturing activity, with large amounts of capital invested, coming in part from the merchant class but far more from Palermitan patricians, who often owned the land or the *trappeto* (the machinery used for crushing the cane).<sup>89</sup> Palermo was not merely the export port for sugar, but, together with its hinterland, the Conca d'Oro, long held a monopoly over its production, at any rate up until 1420–30, when the cultivation of cane spread far beyond the Palermitan territory and as far as the coastal areas of eastern Sicily. The technical superiority of Palermitans in the running of a sugar refinery was beyond dispute. Indeed, technicians from Palermo were invited to Barcelona to set up new manufactories there. This production sector, even where the delicate phase of arranging for the distribution of the product was concerned, continued for a long time to be predominantly in the hands of local producers and investors. They did their utmost to make direct contact with the markets for which the sugar was ultimately destined, namely, Aigues-Mortes, Bruges, Venice or Barcelona, contacting merchants on the spot and organizing transportation in order to free themselves, insofar as it was possible, from the mediation of the foreign merchants in Sicily, who were normally indispensable for the long-distance distribution of Sicilian products.<sup>90</sup> The capillary diffusion across the island of agricultural enterprises such as the *trappeti* was not unconnected to the fact that in the 14th and 15th centuries Palermo also asserted itself as an important market for the trade in slaves, coming mainly from the Maghreb or Black Africa, by way of the Libyan oases, and employed in the abovementioned agricultural enterprises. Since the traffic

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<sup>89</sup> Ouerfelli, *Le sucre*, in particular, pp. 149 ff.

<sup>90</sup> For the mechanics of the exportation process, see *ibid.*, pp. 449–75.

had its origin in North Africa, Sicilian Jews, the last people on the island to speak Arabic as a matter of course, found themselves ideally placed to serve as brokers in such a trade, representing potential clients in their dealings with the traffickers, who were of Sicilian or Catalan origin.<sup>91</sup>

From 1392 the reconquest of Sicily by the Crown of Aragon and Palermo's own geographical position as against that of the other Sicilian ports were factors potentially favouring the growth of the city's commercial relationships with Catalonia and the region of Valencia. There was certainly the political will to proceed in that direction. Thus, in return for their economic support given to the campaign for the reconquest of Sicily, the Catalan and Valencian merchants won complete exemption from the tolls paid on wheat exported from the island, while from 1394–97 the principal offices associated with the running of the port at Palermo were entrusted to Catalans, in particular, the castellany of the Castello a Mare, the office of Guardian of the Port and that of Master of the Arsenal, while the knight appointed castellan of the royal palace of Palermo was likewise a Catalan.<sup>92</sup> However, these measures were not accompanied by absolute Catalan naval and commercial predominance in Palermo and in Sicily, where there was evident rather a subdivision of maritime traffic in the main between Genoese, who still had the upper hand, Catalans and a renascent Sicilian navy.

After two years of anarchy following the death of King Martin I (the Younger) in 1409 and of King Martin II (the Elder) in 1410, the definitive reaffirmation of the Crown of Aragon's sovereignty over Sicily, in 1412, with the advent of Ferdinand I, entailed Palermo's political subordination first to Barcelona and then to Naples, while its rank as capital of Sicily was threatened by Catania. Indeed, it was in Catania that Blanche of Navarre, vicar of the King of Aragon in Sicily, had chosen to reside and it was likewise in Catania that the subsequent sovereign of Aragon and Sicily, Alfonso the Magnanimous, founded the island's first University. Heartened by the Aragonese reconquest, some big Catalan merchants set up various operations in Palermo, in both trade (the exporting of wheat, cotton, salted tuna, sugar) and banking (maritime insurance, money-changing, loans); others placed their hopes upon a swift entry into the upper echelons of the royal administration, preferring, however, Catania and eastern Sicily

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<sup>91</sup> Henri Bresc, "La schiavitù in casa degli ebrei siciliani tra Tre e Quattrocento," *Quaderni storici* 126 (3/2007), pp. 681–83.

<sup>92</sup> Sardina, *Palermo e i Chiaromonte*, pp. 314–26.

to Palermo. The number of merchants of Catalan origin active in Sicily increased markedly, but it was Palermo, above all, that was able to observe, with some surprise, the rapid alteration to the geopolitical context into which it had been inserted: between 1412, the year in which Sicily was definitively united with Aragon, and 1442, when Alfonso the Magnanimous, King of Aragon and Sicily, also conquered the Angevin Kingdom of Naples, the Sicilian capital found itself at the centre of the vast Aragonese area which was expanding like a drop of oil in water, from Catalonia and the region of Valencia to Naples, by way of the Balearic islands and Sardinia. From the start Alfonso counted upon the creation of a vast area of exchange between the various Aragonese dominions, a sort of common market, in order to marginalize Genoa and Pisa itself, which from 1406 onwards was under the sovereignty of Florence, while bonds were tightened between Catalonia, the southern Tyrrhenian littoral with Naples and Gaeta, and, beyond the "Aragonese lake," Tripoli on the Barbary Coast and Egypt, in a curious reactivation of the Palermitan trade routes followed during the epoch of Islamic domination. The Catalans should in theory have derived the most advantage from such a context;<sup>93</sup> in practice, however, though they did succeed in extending their strictly mercantile activities and were not restricted, as they had been in the previous century, to naval transportation, they failed to occupy the entire space available to them, from which the merchant navies of Genoa, Tuscany, Naples and Venice continued to profit. Genoa, however, above all between 1435 and 1450, suffered so many arrests and confiscations that very few of its merchants had a secure operational base in Sicily,<sup>94</sup> while from the beginning of the century the Catalans gradually reduced the overall amount of sugar exported from Palermo to Barcelona, having found another source in Valencia, and, by contrast with their Tuscan rivals, they suffered from a certain weakness in their financial organization.<sup>95</sup>

Tuscan merchants and bankers would therefore be the most active on the Sicilian sugar market in the 15th century, with a trade and banking network which extended from Palermo to Aigues Mortes, Bruges and

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<sup>93</sup> Mario Del Treppo, *I mercanti catalani e l'espansione della Corona d'Aragona nel secolo XV* (Naples, 1972), pp. 202 ff.

<sup>94</sup> Bresc, *Un monde méditerranéen*, pp. 302–306, 377; Epstein, *An Island to Itself*, pp. 285–86.

<sup>95</sup> Mohamed Ouerfelli, "Le transport du sucre en Méditerranée à la fin du Moyen Âge (XIV<sup>e</sup>–XV<sup>e</sup> siècle)," in Coulon, Picard and Valérian, eds., *Espaces et réseaux en Méditerranée*, pp. 269–70.

London. The Pisans, in particular, after Pisa had ceased to be an independent Republic, would find a climate very much in their favour, given their status as victims of Florentine expansionism. On 24 April 1408 King Martin I promulgated, from Catania, a privilege in favour of the Pisans, whose right to come and go, to trade and take up residence in the whole of the island, especially in Palermo, was recognized, as if they were citizens and inhabitants of the Kingdom, even in case of war with Florence (and therefore henceforth with Pisa also).<sup>96</sup> The Pisans, for their part, reacted positively to the royal favour shown to them not only through the immigration from Pisa of many new exponents practitioners of its commerce, welcomed by the more venerable 14th century nucleus of fellow citizens present in Palermo, but also through the noteworthy increase in their requests for naturalization: according to documents produced by the offices of the Secrezia and of the Council of Palermo, between 1416 and 1459 there were 2 requests to be registered as new citizens lodged by Florentines and a full 15 requests submitted by Pisans.<sup>97</sup> The Pisan immigration to Palermo then under way consisted of those in the great mercantile and banking houses, which would later transfer their financial activities to their adopted metropolis (Alliata, Gaetani, da Settimo, Aiutamichristo), devoting themselves in the meantime to producing and to trading in grain (Vernagalli, da Settimo), and also to highly prized products requiring high levels of investment such as salted tuna, cotton and of course sugar (Alliata, Bonconti, da Caprona, del Campo, Gaetani, Lancia, Vernagalli).<sup>98</sup> With regard to this latter product, precisely because they were exiles and certainly destined for rapid naturalization, those Pisan merchant-bankers who had immigrated most recently found themselves granted complete freedom to trade in, and produce, a product which the urban aristocracy of Palermo had regarded as their exclusive preserve.<sup>99</sup> In Palermo, the responsibility for dealing with banks of deposit and letters of change, elsewhere so closely associated with the Florentines, became the Pisan merchant-bankers' prerogative.<sup>100</sup> The fact that the latter, resident in Palermo, had attained to absolute pre-eminence in the Sicilian

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<sup>96</sup> Giuseppe Petralia, *Banchieri e famiglie mercantili nel Mediterraneo aragonese. L'emigrazione dei Pisani in Sicilia nel Quattrocento* (Pisa, 1989), pp. 51, 347 and note 161.

<sup>97</sup> Bresc, *Un monde méditerranéen*, p. 373.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 411; Epstein, *An Island to Itself*, p. 284.

<sup>99</sup> Petralia, *Banchieri e famiglie*, pp. 328, 330.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

banking and financial spheres, and that from 1435 the island of Sicily had become the lynchpin of Alfonso the Magnanimous' strategic plan for the conquest of the Kingdom of Naples, meant that between the 1430s and the 1450s a very firm bond was established between the Palermo of the Pisan merchant-bankers, masters of the most advanced instruments for delivering credit, and the Aragonese court.<sup>101</sup> Amongst other things, this bond earned the city its royal reconfirmation as capital of the Kingdom of Sicily in 1437, despite the aspirations and counterclaims of Catania. In the space between four capital cities—Valencia, Barcelona, Naples and Palermo—there unfolded speculative gambling on the outcome of exchanges effected at the King's bidding, and with the one who stood to gain being, apart from the Pisan bankers enjoying the royal trust, the King himself.<sup>102</sup> It had been a long time since a King was resident in Palermo, but this did not mean that the Crown exerted scant influence upon the city in the Alfonsine epoch.

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<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 51–52.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

RELIGIOUS PALERMO:  
A PANORAMA BETWEEN THE 12TH AND THE 15TH CENTURIES

Henri Bresc

The Palermitan church, reconstructed in the 12th century, within a zone of Christendom strongly marked by original Greek and Arab features, led the city's inhabitants in the course of three centuries towards a more classical, Italianized and Tuscanized Christianity. Never occupying an obviously very central place in a Sicily that was anyway polycephalous, and having therefore to vie with other poles of attraction, namely, the archbishopric of Messina and the archimandritate of S. Salvatore, it was nonetheless rich, powerful and sustained by an active clergy. The archives contain scant information regarding the personnel, or the running of the churches, nor do they enable us to flesh out the general tenor of religious devotion. In short, we lack a corpus of ecclesiastical, legal or hagiographic archives. Using the tithe returns, however, which are held in the Archives at Rome, we can list the churches and their incumbents, for 1308, for 1346–1347, and for 1455–1457, while the Registers at the Vatican and the Latran give a large number of reports put to use by Salvatore Fodale.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, we have had recourse to a source lacking in the rest of the island, a set of wills, 958 in all, from 1298 to 1460,<sup>2</sup> which allow us to reconstitute a serial history of devotion as seen from below, while a certain number of notarized contracts describe the ecclesiastical establishments and identify and list the clergy and the friars.

THE ECCLESIAL LANDSCAPE

*The Reconstruction*

The restoration of the Palermitan church from the end of the 11th century onwards must be seen in the context of a multi-confessional city: the

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<sup>1</sup> Salvatore Fodale, *Alumni della perdizione. Chiesa e potere in Sicilia durante il grande Scisma (1372–1416)*, Istituto storico per il Medio Evo, Nuovi studi storici, 80, (Rome, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Henri Bresc, *Un Monde méditerranéen: économie et société en Sicile (1300–1460)*, Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome, fasc. 262 (Paris-Rome-Palermo, 1986), pp. 607–622.



Muslims retained their mosques, their law and their judges until the inevitable crisis, extending from 1190 to 1240, and the Jewish community preserved a fairly favourable *dhimma* status up until the expulsion of 1492–1493, decided and enacted despite the local authorities being opposed to it.<sup>3</sup> Rechristianization began with the foundation by the monarchy and the grandees, that is to say, the Greek- and Arab-speaking emirs, of churches and monasteries clustered together in the upper town of the Cassaro, the centre of comital and monarchical power. Of the thirty-five churches attested for the 12th century, there being thirty-two in the city itself and three in its suburb, twenty, or two-thirds, were situated in the Cassaro, and of these the majority were monasteries. A “Greek” group was constituted around the monastery of Santa Maria della Grotta, which stood next to the torrent of Kemonia, in the quarter of the future Albergheria, which then had seven churches, established on the site of ancient sanctuaries situated in caves. Further on, the Magione, then a Cistercian monastery, and the Hierosolymitan hospital of S. Giovanni alla Guilla, were built on the empty fields of the future Borgo. The Cassaro then assumed its guise as a religious centre: at the end of the 13th century it still housed thirty-six of the seventy-eight urban churches, in other words, 46% of them, and at the end of the 15th century, seventy-two churches out of 173, that is 41%.

The Greeks, in particular the Mozarabs, offered crucial support to rechristianization. One index is supplied by the dedications of some of the oldest churches. The churches dedicated to saints from the “Greek” pole, as defined by Sulamith Brodbeck,<sup>4</sup> numbered fifteen within the city, of which six were in the Cassaro, while two were situated beyond the walls. A set of churches following the Greek rite, S. Tommaso dei Greci in the Cassaro, S. Nicola La Carrubba in the Kalsa, S. Nicola de Chufra and S. Nicola de Kemonia, the rupestrian churches of Santa Venera and of S. Pancrazio in the Albergheria, delineate a Greek Palermo which would fade in the course of the 14th century. These were Greeks in liturgy but not in language, having adopted the Romance dialect of Sicily, a nebulous presence around the “courtyard” and the street known as *Grecia* in the Albergheria, close to the Giudecca, with which various coerced immi-

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<sup>3</sup> To give just one example: in 1491, with the agreement of the Pope, the archbishop decided to deconsecrate the abandoned churches in the Jewish quarter, and to allow the master doctor Prosper de La Bonavogla to buy the ruins of Sant’Ippolito in the Cassaro.

<sup>4</sup> Demetrius, Onofrius, Marina, Pancratius, the Forty Martyrs and Theodor; Sulamith Brodbeck, *Les Saints de la cathédrale de Monreale en Sicile*, Collection de l’École française de Rome, 432 (Rome, 2010).

grants merged, slaves from the Byzantine Empire, who, though soon freed, had stood by one another and clustered around the church of Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio. Greek priests watched over them until the 15th century, some of them from Morea, Patras and Clarentia, while others were Sicilian and married, the *protopappas* being their representative to the archbishop. Study of wills shows that there was no breach between Greeks and Latins: several, who were notables, and even a priest from the Cathedral, made provision for legacies to the monastery of the Grotta, and invited Greek and Latin clergy to their funerals indiscriminately. The process of decline was slow and inexorable: the Grotta had seven monks in 1342, still had six in 1362, but only two in 1373, and then, after the monastery had been refloated by monks originating from Marsala and Noto, it was given in commenda.

Norman Sicily had reconstructed devotion to the saints, recovered some forms of veneration from the pre-Muslim past, and imported various others, be they universal saints or objects of the individual piety of the prince or of a minister.<sup>5</sup> Recoveries from the Christian past only occurred on a modest scale at Palermo: the "Sicilian" saints, generally linked to their town of origin,<sup>6</sup> enjoyed limited success. Only universal saints, such as Agatha, already honoured by a Byzantine church whose memory had been perpetuated in Arabic place-names, and Lucia, were deeply popular; ten such churches could be counted within the city and four outside its walls, four of which were dedicated to Agatha. Palermo embraced only Lucia, Pancras of Taormina, Phillip of Argirò and Venera, but it also adopted two saints of African origin, namely, Calogero and Olivia, along with Vito (Guy), a Lucanian saint. The only saint who was strictly speaking Palermitan, Rosalia, enjoyed only a modest popularity up until the 17th century.

The white mantle of the constructed or reconstructed churches is an expression of the Norman melting-pot. Built on the foundation walls of the Palaeo-Christian church, itself reoccupied by the *jāmi'* mosque, the cathedral, which was completed in 1185, is a huge and powerful edifice which combines a basilica plan, expressed through the height and lightness of the volumes, with original forms, such as blind arcades and lava decoration on the facades and the apses. The elevation, the verticality of the cathedral, as of the Cappella Palatina and the Magione, is a feature

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<sup>5</sup> Annliese Nef, *La re-christianisation de la Sicile et le culte des saints au XII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, mémoire inédit de l'École française de Rome, 2002.

<sup>6</sup> Agrippina was linked to Mineo, Leoluca to Corleone, Philadelphus and his brothers to Lentini, Vital to Castronovo.

shared by the architecture of the many small churches clustered in the Cassaro. The basilica plan is very widespread (Santa Maria Maddalena, S. Cataldo, S. Giovanni dei Lebbrosi, Monreale, Santo Spirito) and may sometimes be combined with the raising up of the sanctuary on the Greek plan (Palatine Chapel) and with roofed domes. Other edifices are on a Byzantine plan in the form of the Greek cross, for example, Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio (the Martorana) and Sant'Antonio in the Cassaro. A stately and austere architecture, and the embossing of the walls with small stones, are combined with a decoration indicative of majesty: mosaics with a gold background, solemn figures, dominated by Christ Pantocrator, the Virgin Odigitria, and the angels. The enduring prestige of these Norman models, and the popularity of their archaic forms, accounts for the fame of these monuments, the Martorana, described as a "precious jewel" in 1451, the Cappella Palatina, restored in 1460, Monreale too, which the Gascon Nompars de Caumont admired in 1420 and which in 1472 was deemed to be an "excellent and very worthy building, comparable with the worthiest and most excellent buildings in the whole Universe."<sup>7</sup>

The parishes structuring Palermitan space<sup>8</sup> appeared towards the end of the 13th century in bequests, as did the Cathedral itself: small, conditional gifts were designed to attract clergy attached to the parishes or to the Cathedral chapel to funeral processions. The choice of burial in the parish church was part and parcel of the 13th century devotional "ancien régime," from which Palermitans were gradually breaking away: from 40% of all testators and testatrices in the first half of the 14th century, the numbers fell to 29% in the second half of the century, and to 20% between 1400 and 1460. This choice served to shape the urban landscape: a seedbed of cemeteries was located around the parish and other churches with a sepulchral vocation, such as Santa Marina, Santa Croce and la Maddalena in the Galca.

A third volet made up the devotional "ancien régime", namely, the expressions of individual piety at urban or periurban monasteries: as in the case of parish burial, this was particularly common with women; one in four at the beginning of the 14th century, with one in five leaving a legacy to a monastery and with one in thirteen choosing to be buried

<sup>7</sup> Giuseppe Bellafiore, *Architettura in Sicilia (1415-1535)* (Palermo, 1984), p. 177.

<sup>8</sup> They are ten in number: S. Giacomo la Marina and Sta Margherita in the Conceria, attested in 1264, Sant'Antonio in the Cassaro, Sant'Ippolito and Sta Croce in the Seralcadi (1267), S. Nicolò dei Latini all'Albergheria (1284), S. Nicolò dei Latini in the Kalsa (1306), S. Giovanni dei Tartari all'Albergheria (1327).

there, whereas the men rarely acted thus, with one in ten making a gift and one in twenty opting for burial there, and the numbers would have been still lower had it not been for the adoption of a eremitical spirituality on the part of the new monasteries, S. Martino and the Vergini. The new convents had taken the place of the old monastery.

Another noteworthy form of devotion had been inherited from the 12th century, that addressed to the Holy Land sanctuaries, the Commandery of the Knights Hospitaller at S. Giovanni Battista alla Guilla, the Hospital of the SS. Trinità della Magione, belonging to the Teutonic Knights, and a convent of the small congregation of Augustinian nuns at Santa Maria in Valverde of Saint John of Acre. A few belated legacies relating to the Crusades served to prolong this form of piety.

#### *The New Piety: Mendicants and Confraternities*

The advent of the mendicant orders led to the tradition of eremitism being combined with Palermo's communal aspirations, backed by the Tuscan merchants: the first church of the minor friars was built on a plot given by the Pisans, whereas legend has it that saint Angelus the Carmelite had been given shelter at the Greek monastery of la Grotta. Sicily served as a refuge for the "fraticelli" and in Palermo the movement for poverty took a violent turn: in 1328, the Father Superior of S. Francesco was detained by the archbishop and then released at the behest of the Commune. Franciscans and Dominicans were in dispute, while "the people were greatly perplexed." Hostility to the Avignon Papacy fostered an association between Franciscanism and the Ghibelline cause. Brother Ubertino of Corleone was charged in 1373 with having stirred up the Ghibellines of Piacenza, and with having favoured the projected marriage of Frederick IV with the daughter of Galeazzo Visconti, thereby fostering a rear alliance against Angevin Naples and against the States of the Church. But note the complete absence of heresy, save for a fleeting trace of "Patarines" in the toponymy of the Cassaro, in the *darbum de Pactarenis* attested in 1337.

In the 13th century this first revolution in piety saw the building of monasteries, serving as new centres of devotion: S. Francesco between the quarters of Porta Patitelli and the Kalsa, S. Domenico between Porta Patitelli and the Seralcadi, then Sant'Agostino in the Seralcadi itself, and finally the Carmelite monastery in the new quarter of the Albergheria. These were all imposing monuments, deploying a sober Gothic architecture, designed for preaching, with a single nave at Sant'Agostino and three naves at S. Francesco. They took their inspiration from Tuscany, whereas

in painting the importation of works by Gera de Pisa and Antonio Veneziano meant that the models were predominantly Pisan, although the Genoese workshops also left their mark (the *Madonna dell'Umiltà*, 1346). Figures afflicted by pain and sorrow now supplanted the ancient images of serene majesty, and Palermitans set eyes on a suffering Christ made human, Christ as the Man of Sorrows, Christ scourged, the Virgin likewise made human, humble or protective.

The mendicant orders' popularity became increasingly evident in the 14th century, as confessors and as executors of wills. The numbers choosing burial in a monastery or associated confraternity oscillated, depending upon the decade, between 35% and 55% of all testators and testatrices in the 14th century, the average being 41%, leading to a proliferation of familial funerary chapels and of the first lateral chapels. Between 1400 and 1460, this practice underwent a noteworthy decline: between 25% and 40% for men, and between 25% and 68% for women, with the average being 36.5%. The same development is evident in the choice of funereal garb, which was almost always that of the Franciscans; the women, who had very early embraced an Observant spirituality, subsequently remained faithful to the mendicant habit, whereas only one in three, or one in five, Palermitan men chose it. This abandonment also found expression in a steep decline in the number of friars at S. Francesco and, to a lesser extent, at S. Domenico, falling from sixteen in both monasteries before 1348 to six in 1365 at S. Domenico, going back up to thirteen in 1376 and then oscillating between sixteen and twenty-two, whereas the number of Franciscans climbed laboriously back up to thirteen in 1425 and to sixteen in 1446.

*Permanent Features and Elements of Renewal:  
Eremitism, Hospitals and Poverty*

An original feature of Palermitan religious life was the enduring commitment of the inhabitants to the radical Franciscan movement, to rural and urban eremitism,<sup>9</sup> and to the poverty of the Order of Penitence, of the Continent friars. Monastic and eremitical devotion found expression from a very early date in church dedications, nine of them *intra muros*, concen-

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<sup>9</sup> Henri Breso, "L'érémitisme franciscain en Sicile," in *Francescanesimo e cultura in Sicilia (secc. XIII-XVI)*, *Atti del convegno internazionale di studio nell'ottavo centenario della nascita di San Francesco d'Assisi (Palermo, mars 1982)*, *Schede medievali* 12-13, January-December 1987, pp. 37-44.

trated in the Cassaro and old, and five outside the walls.<sup>10</sup> The only two Palermitan saints, Rosalia and Geraldo, were indeed hermits.

The link between the eremitical movement, Franciscanism and the founding of hospitals and charitable institutions reflected an attempt on the laity's part to establish its autonomy from the Church. After its dissolution at the Council of Lyons of 1274, the order of Continent friars continued to resist in Sicily until around 1430, identifying itself with the third order of St. Francis and without reducing itself to a mere company of lay devotion. The mention of over thirty confreres in the notarized contracts coincided with those years in which the popular movement which had supported the Vespers was at its strongest. Clothworkers, fishermen, market gardeners, such as Fra Lorenzo de Finoculo, known between 1320 and 1337, engaged in small-scale trade, the purchase of grapes, the loaning of small sums. The Continent friars, devoted as they were to the service of the Christian people, were called upon by testators to carry the bodies of the dead. A donation by the magnate Ugo Talac enabled three such friars to found the hospital of Sant'Anna on the heights of Monreale, where the memory of the Gregorian monastery of S. Martino lingered still. Up until 1383 this small hospital or monastery had a minister and one or two friars, under the title of "order of Sant'Anna of the Steps of S. Martino," and then it became a hermitage to which a Franciscan bishop *in partibus* withdrew. The institution then gradually fell into line with the monastic models, although still retaining the hospital function shared by other monasteries.

This institutional flexibility, which was anyway universal, accounts for the great number of small hospitals: around 1431, when the municipality combined them all into a single new, and very large, Hospital, there were at least thirty-four of them, ten in the Cassaro, nine in the Seralcadi, five in the Kalsa, two in the Conceria, one in the Albergheria, seven outside the walls, without counting the two hierosolymitan foundations, S. Giovanni alla Guilla and the Magione, both of which took care of the sick and of lepers. Nine of these hospitals were run by confraternities, whilst a tenth, in the Kalsa, Santa Maria della Misericordia, was a grange attached to the Cistercian abbey of Fossanova. These buildings were located in well-established centres of piety, whereas travellers and pilgrims tended to frequent the Conceria.

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<sup>10</sup> Antonio, Calogero, Cono, Elia, Leonardo, Mary Magdalene, Onofrio, Rosalia, Venera and Geraldo, a hermit on the slopes of mounts Erice and Etna before joining the Franciscans, staunch advocates of poverty.

The preoccupation with poverty set in early and was very intense: one in three wills provided for three distributions of food, one in seven a legacy to the hospitals; still others endowed orphans or left a legacy to fund the liberation of those held captive in Barbary. A concern for the wretched, already very marked at the beginning of the 14th century, when 40% of wills provided for a legacy for the poor, peaked between 1320 and 1360, with two in three testators making such a provision, and then levelled out: one in two Palermitans designated beggars, the sick, orphans, captives or even the blind in their bequests.

Reforms carried out in the 15th century show how enduring was the preoccupation with poverty, and the capacity of the mendicant orders to bounce back. The Dominican Observance and the Observant Carmelites established their monasteries on the periphery, in garden corridors rich in churches, the first in Santa Cita in the Seralcadi (it accommodated, from 1455, seventeen friars, almost as many as S. Domenico), and the second in Sant'Antonio at the Porta de Termini, between the Kalsa and the Albergheria. Only the Observant Franciscans settled outside the walls, at Santa Maria de Gesù, their presence resulting in the creation of a first cemetery, on the "piano" in front of the church. The women were quick to embrace the new spirituality, choosing to be buried in the Observants' habit between 1420 and 1460 and demanding that the order grant them a burial. The Observants were hugely popular: it was the Observant Franciscans who were asked by the municipality to preach at Lent, among them fra Angelo de Clavisio, Vicar General of the Franciscan Observance, in 1480, as the plague was raging, then fra Serafino de Melfi, "capable of preaching as readily on Aristotle or Plato as on Thomas Aquinas," in 1486, then brother Bernardo of Capua in 1487, and, the following year, fra Roberto Caracciolo, described, mistakenly, as bishop of Melfi, and a dreaded, anti-Jewish, preacher, then brother Mariano de Girazano in 1489, and master Agostino of Lucca in 1494.

### *The Confraternities*

Belatedly, and in imitation of Genoa and Tuscany, the confraternities became increasingly the focus of religious devotion, offering spiritual succour, assisting with funerals and assembling groups that shared a similar piety, and not groups of neighbours or workmates.<sup>11</sup> Devotion was not a

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<sup>11</sup> Vita Russo, *Il fenomeno confraternale a Palermo (secc. XIV-XV)*, Quaderni mediterranei, 13 (Palermo, 2010).

mask for economic solidarity. We do not encounter craft confraternities, even if the belated constitution of the “Arts” led to the adoption of patron saints, nor national confraternities, but there was a church for Amalfitans, Sant’Andrea, a church for Catalans, Santa Maria or Santa Eulalia, and a funerary chapel, Santa Maria de Monserrato, in S. Domenico, open to non-Catalans, whereas a group of Luccans doubtless founded the church of Santa Cita, belated saint of Lucca. A confraternity of Genoese did not emerge until 1480, at S. Francesco, while the confraternity of saint Ranieri, a Pisan, based in the hospital of the Pisans, only appeared at the end of the 15th century.

We know of twenty-seven confraternities in the 14th, and seventy-two in the 15th century: a little less than a third (23) in the numerous churches in the Cassaro, eighteen in the Seralcadi, whereas the Albergheria only had ten, the Kalsa seven, and the Conceria, a trades quarter, six. The dedications are widely distributed, from physician saints (Cosmas and Damian) to saints protecting souls on their final journey (James), with the Virgin being specially favoured (nine confraternities), to Nicholas (four), and to the Forty Martyrs (four). Invocations to the “auxiliary” saints, though admittedly in a minority (twelve), are nonetheless already noteworthy.

At the heart of the devotional model evident in the second half of the 14th, and in the 15th century, lay the act of penitence, and the confraternities had a disciplinary function, as is confirmed by the representation on the confrères’ illuminated rolls of Flagellants, in 1346 and again around 1400. The choice of burial in a confraternity charnel-house was available to men from 1350, with one in four choosing this from 1350 to 1400, and one in two between 1400 and 1460. Their example was followed initially by a small number of women, four only before 1400 from seventy-seven testatrixes, then by a third of testatrixes between 1400 and 1460, while the choice of the disciplinary sack as funereal garb shows how popular the Flagellants were. This was what two-thirds of men opted for in the second half of the 14th century, and three in four between 1400 and 1460, and one woman in three, with some accumulating several sacks. Double membership was in fact by no means rare, and this led to ideas and practices circulating amongst the different confraternities.

The confraternities were secular, autonomous and administered by elected rectors. Their liberty to run their own affairs did arouse the suspicion of the political authorities: in 1486, the Senate banned women from taking part in the processions and from appearing with their heads covered by the disciplinary “sack” when collecting alms, and officials were authorized to uncover them so that they might be recognized. Echoes of



the confraternal movement may be discerned in the clerical world: from 1375 onwards in the sepulchral church of Santa Maria la Pinta, in the Galca, the legacies of a group of nobles had served to found a “house” of priests living as a community, and, in the neighbouring church of S. Giacomo la Mazara, the priest Enrico de Simone established around 1440 and made lavish financial provision, to the sum of 12,000 florins, for a college of priests and regular clergy committed, following the example of S. Giorgio in Alga di Venezia, to a shared life and to “*devotio moderna*”.

#### *Reclassifications and New Foundations in the 15th Century*

The ecclesial landscape diversified in the 14th and 15th centuries. The inner religious solidarity of the different quarters of the city began to fade: many Palermitans now chose to be buried in a church lying outside their own quarter, preferring a personal form of devotion to the discipline of the neighbourhood, and this was the case with nearly a quarter of the men in the 14th century and almost a half of them between 1400 and 1460. Out of four fishermen’s wills, for example, all four from the parish of S. Nicola alla Kalsa, two expressed a particular devotion to the Carmelite monastery (in the heart of the Albergheria) and requested to be buried there, while a third was a confrere at Sant’Agata al Cassaro. The women, who rarely left their houses and never did so unaccompanied, remained for a long time attached to the church at the end of the street although they also worshipped in churches in their parents’ quarter. After 1350 one in three women chose burial far from her own house. As the mendicant orders and the confraternities gained ground, a unified space of piety was established.

The ecclesial geography was increasingly centred upon the upper town, which had seventy-two churches, or almost half of the 147 sanctuaries located *intra muros*, alongside thirty-one in the Seralcadi, nineteen in the Albergheria, thirteen in the Conceria and eleven in the Kalsa: the Cassaro had been abandoned by mendicant devotion, but the former churches were recycled and became the headquarters of confraternities, with the college of S. Giacomo la Mazara being located there. The commune’s attention was focussed upon the cathedral, which was undergoing a profound process of transformation: first of all there was the building on the tower opposite, over forty years, of a tall campanile which collapsed in 1351 destroying the facade, then the construction of the treasury chapel in 1390. A long-term building programme followed: the southern portico with its carved, coloured and ostensibly gilded decoration offered access

in 1426 from the cathedral, through the carved doors of 1432, to the “piano,” a vast cemetery encumbered with funerary churches, pierced with caves and already the site of a market and a fair, a space paved with ceramic tiles under archbishop Simone Bologna (1446–1465) and furnished with a fountain in 1477. Through this programme the monument was set upon a new axis, orientated towards the city. Everywhere the links between the sanctuary and the town were reinforced: a good number of churches likewise opened out on to the streets and the squares, through the building of a portico, “theatre” or *tocco*, on the façade of SS. Quaranta al Casalotto, on that of the parish church of S. Giovanni dei Tartari, and on that of S. Cusimano, each designed to welcome worshippers and neighbours. A voluntary and concerted movement enriched and embellished the ecclesial landscape: aside from the building of Observant churches, featuring a vast single nave intended for preaching as at the Gancia, and the vigorous campaign for the fitting-out of new chapels, the 15th century saw the adoption of a florid, Catalanizing Gothic style. On the initiative of fra Salvo Cazzetta, the church of S. Domenico, the “beauty and ornament of the city” which attracted “so many visits from citizens and men of substance,” was rebuilt, the project being completed in 1479. It was around this time that the churches adopted a chapel of the Holy Sacrament, built in marble and situated within the cathedral.

Finally, the 15th century witnessed the crystallization of forms of mural decoration serving to foster piety, in particular Marian devotion. Antonino Mongitore has thus recorded, though without managing to date them precisely, images of the Virgin at Porta Vittoria, Porta Patitelli, and Porta Vicari, and also at the Guilla, the Vucciria and the Martorana, where Federico III in 1328 came to pray before the image of Mary. Several notarized contracts made provision for painted decoration on the porticos of churches, for panels which recount the stories of the saints, and for the restoration or copying of old images.

#### THE ECCLESIAL FRAMEWORK

The Palermitan Church benefited from a long period of autonomy from the Papacy in the 14th and 15th centuries. Along with the whole of Sicily the city was subjected to an interdict for long decades, during the war of the Vespers and up until 1302, then, after rare remissions which stopped when the war started up again, in 1321 and in 1339, up until 1370. Palermo had to adapt and in 1336, on Federico IV's instructions, to impose an interiorized

practice, without any visible celebration or use of sound in services: the office was celebrated at dawn, behind closed doors, in a hushed voice and without bells, canonic hours and funerals were announced with very brief chimes, and obsequies were held without processions. The absence of the religious orders from funerals gave rise to protests in 1336.

### *The Great Institutions*

The cathedral was a political centre closely linked to the monarchy; the archbishops were chosen from among the royal kinsmen in the first half of the 14th century, then, after a long period in which Sicilian kingship was politically inconspicuous, thereby allowing the Avignon Papacy to regain a degree of control, the Aragonese dynasty re-established its authority. The Catalan archbishops of the period of the conquest were succeeded by Sicilian patricians of high intellectual calibre, jurists employed in the service of the Trastámara. These prelates, either absentee or ephemeral, tended by and large to leave their spiritual duties, and the management of a substantial patrimony, to the canons. While the total income of the clergy of the diocese had mounted to some 1,500 onze in 1308, and to 2,400 in 1456, the *mensa* in fact brought in 600 onze in 1308 and 650 in 1456 (including the chapter's income), but the canons' shared income was only seventy-one onze in 1308–1310, and they therefore found themselves obliged to supplement their prebend with benefices in the city. They were twenty-four in number, and had to live off a total income not exceeding a hundred onze, and their number was therefore reduced to eighteen in 1443. Until 1350, alongside the local canons, the Avignon Papacy appointed twenty or so absentee canons, who were Roman or Genoese; their places were later taken by canons of local origin, in part drawn from the civic nobility—from families of jurats and judges<sup>12</sup>—and in part from canonic families,<sup>13</sup> whose fortune was based upon the administration of Cathedral property and who maintained the wealth of the *mensa* through *post mortem* donations of houses and vineyards involving the circulation of funds between their own inheritances and the Church patrimony. As jurists, whether in civil or in canon law, they proved to be expert administrators.

The cathedral was not the only great institution to dominate the city, and account should also be taken of the Cappella Palatina, though it cut a slightly different figure. The latter was not so wealthy, since its chapter

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<sup>12</sup> Bologna, Cancellario, Carastono, Imperatore, Speciale, Tagliavia.

<sup>13</sup> Crimona, Labro, Russo, Zaffaronibus.

only had eight prebends, and it also assumed a federal character, combining the prelates of Agrigento, Catania, Cefalù, Messina and Polizzi, twenty-three of the thirty-six canons known to us, whereas the prestigious function of cantor devolved upon those loyal to the monarchy: eleven Catalans out of the thirty cantors recorded, as against five Palermitans and five Sicilians from other parts of the island. The Cappella Palatina was thus a breeding-ground of bishops for the monarchy to draw upon. Finally, some kilometres from the city, the archdiocese of Monreale represented a kernel of wealth and prestige that might rival the cathedral of Palermo. Attached to a Benedictine monastery, which served as a chapterhouse, the archdiocese had almost no souls in its care, just two townships, Corleone and Bisacquino, aside from the tiny centre of Monreale, and control in total barely 7000 inhabitants in 1375. Monreale's net income was therefore considerable, and the object of conflict and rivalry between foreign prelates, Catalan, Roman and Genoese, allied to or in the service of the Royal Court, which estranged it from Palermo. Like the chapter of the Cappella Palatina, that of Monreale mirrored the clergy of all of Sicily: of the twelve monks known to us between 1305 and 1370, eight were designated by the name of their birthplace, Catania, Nicosia, Randazzo etc. This immigration was anyway necessary, for want of any regular local recruitment; the monastery had no monks at all in 1311.

The other pillars of the ecclesiastical universe, aside from the ten parish churches, were the urban and peri-urban monasteries, of which there were seventeen in total. Following an ancient tradition, closely allied to Greek monachism, these were small establishments (three to five monks at the Cistercian Santo Spirito, two enclosed nuns at Santa Maria de Sykeki, which had passed from the "Basilean order" to the Benedictines, and three in the Cistercian monastery-hospital of la Misericordia, a dependency of Fossanova). Some became simple prebends of uncertain status, entrusted to lay abbots, as was the case with S. Michele de Indulcis in 1308 and in 1334.

Palermitans' devotion to the great ecclesial institutions was at once political and communal; Monreale was ignored in wills, which, in the 13th century, left small sums to the monasteries; this practice did however decline, being reduced latterly to some isolated and personal devotions (to S. Martino delle Scale, in particular, and where the Catalans were concerned, to Santa Maria d'Altofonte, daughter of the Cistercian abbey of Santes Creus and founded in 1305). The crisis suffered by the Benedictine order was in fact very evident at the beginning of the 14th century: there were ten enclosed nuns at the Martorana in 1328, seven

prior to the outbreak of the Plague and four in 1364, although the convent recovered at the turn of the century and had more than twenty nuns in 1450. The same crisis, and the same process of recovery, at Santa Maria del Cancelliere, bears witness to the flourishing of a new religious sensibility, quasi-eremital and relayed by new institutions that met with success and a steady influx, as at S. Martino delle Scale, which was founded in 1347 and which already had 29 monks in 1376, and, in the city, at Santa Maria delle Vergini (34 sisters in 1455), which followed the regular observance of S. Martino and welcomed the daughters of the patricians.

The social role of the monasteries and nunneries, which accommodated widows, daughters and younger sons, whose vocations might well have been under duress, accounts for the fact that the Palermitans were preoccupied by questions of morality, such as the chastity of the enclosed nuns, and the proper running of the establishments: in 1410, regular observance was no longer respected at S. Giovanni degli Eremiti, whose abbot kept a concubine; in 1416, Santa Maria degli Angeli, in Baida, was "a nest of brigands, and lair of wild beasts;" in 1430 the debauched state of the Dominican nuns at Santa Caterina in the Cassaro was denounced, with the Abbatellis family then intervening and imposing one of its daughters as abbess. Other scandals, between 1410 and 1452, shook the convent of SS. Salvatore.<sup>14</sup>

#### *Wealth and Estate Management*

The wealth of the Palermitan clergy was impressive: in 1447 the property belonging to the Cathedral was leased out for 600 onze (3000 florins); there were twenty-five fiefs (*latifondi*), scattered over the whole of central and western Sicily, gardens, mills, springs in the Conca d'Oro, and rights over fishing nets. The other Palermitan institutions held fifty-five fiefs, with the Teutonic Knights' Magione accounting for seven of them, the abbey of Altofonte for eight, and S. Martino delle Scale for nine, the most important holders of property. To this one should add an abundant patrimony of urban properties leased in quit-rent, houses, shops, warehouses, gardens, vineyards and orchards, and rights over water used for irrigation: the monasteries had been established in the outlying quarters of the city and endowed with vast garden areas which they had in part urbanized; subsequent donations tended to involve isolated houses

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<sup>14</sup> Fodale, *Alunni*, p. 710 (1414 and not 1416), ASP, R. C. 65, f. 116 (1430), Arxiu de la Corona de Aragó, Barcelona, Cancileria 2853, f. 107v (1446).

scattered across the entire city and less easily administered. The administrators had to contend with depreciation of properties, the failure to pay rents and buildings falling into rack and ruin.

The administration of these huge patrimonies was first of all taken on by clerics, canons and monks at S. Martino and at Altofonte, by Dominicans at Santa Caterina, and by Teutonic knights at the Magione: not content with leasing their lands to Palermitan agricultural entrepreneurs, S. Martino and the Magione set up and directly managed cerealiculture and stockbreeding enterprises, bovine and porcine, on their own lands and even on fiefs which they had rented. Some of the administrators were also entrepreneurs, no doubt relying upon efficient families: canon Dom Rinaldo de Brixia, from a family of notaries, thus bought the Cathedral's revenues for 1419–1420 and 1420–1421.<sup>15</sup>

The laity involved themselves in administration, notaries first and foremost at the Cathedral and at Santa Caterina, and merchants who soon guaranteed all of the renting out, the leasing of the Cathedral's property. This wealth did indeed serve to sharpen appetites: the brother of the Catalan archbishop Joan de Proixida in 1408, then the Carastono, Matteo, brother-in-law of the archbishop Ubertino de Marinis, in 1414, Giovanni in 1420, Giovanni di Niccolò from 1426 to 1441, Pietro in 1456, rented the Cathedral's revenues, and in 1451, under archbishop Simone Bologna, his relative Bartolomeo, in partnership with the Pisan Gerardo Agliata, a jurist and high-ranking civil servant but from a family of bankers. The archbishops and their relatives launched themselves into the boom enterprise of the years 1420–1450, sugar cane production: the archbishop of Monreale Giovanni Ventimiglia and his brother rented the fiefdom of Partinico with a view to planting sugar canes there, and in 1453 Simone Bologna sold some of the Cathedral's quit-rents for 50 onze in order to raise some ready cash. The danger was plainly a disguised alienation of the Cathedral's patrimony, with relatives, political allies or patrons with vested interests as the parties standing to benefit. After 1430, when agricultural rents showed a healthy increase, the Papal Court therefore set up enquiries into quitrent concessions, emphyteutic leases that risked depriving the ecclesiastical establishments of the profits arising from economic growth. In 1477, a dozen or so of the Cathedral's fiefs, in the Conca d'Oro or scattered across

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<sup>15</sup> Kristjan Toomaspoeg, *Les Teutoniques en Sicile (1197–1492)*, Collection de l'École française de Rome, 321 (Rome, 2003).

Sicily, had already passed into the hands of such leaseholders, half of them from the Bologna family.<sup>16</sup>

*Personnel and Functions*

The secular clergy had been numerous around 1310; after 1360, however, in order to ward off the combined effects of plague, civil war and the long interdict, it must be reconstituted. In 1363 archbishop Ottaviano de Labro won from Avignon the right to confer the tonsure on young clerics four times a year, in order to offset the consequences of emigration. The ensuing abundance of benefices subsequently swelled their ranks: with no fewer than 55 incumbents in the register of the apostolic tithe for 1456, along with twenty cathedral dignitaries, the notarized contracts reveal a veritable clerical proletariat that offered to enter into affermage contracts with a view to renting churches, but also, for want of any regular employment, were prepared to work with their hands, and also to teach.

The clergy, in the service of the public, thus took on functions which placed it under the authority of the municipality, ranging from aspects of schooling to the teaching and practice of music and singing. From 1317, the commune thus assumed responsibility for the wages of the Cathedral organists and for those of the sub-chantors who taught melody and the "discipline of singing." Some priests were also teachers in private schools: they took on disciples who would serve them until sufficiently trained to accede to the diaconate; they bequeathed them books, among them Latin classics, grammar manuals and the Tuscan poets, Dante and Petrarch. One of them, in 1406, even undertook to train a canon in grammar and in logic. The Church was a centre of instruction, with special pathways open to humanist culture and no doubt also to sophisticated technical knowledge: it was a monk from Palermo, fra Giuliano Maiali, who built the bridges and the breakwater around 1440. Finally, the clergy maintained close relations with the wider world: clerics received bursaries from the commune enabling them to pursue studies in theology at distant universities, Cologne, Padua or Paris, thus adding nuances to the otherwise exclusive relationship established by the jurists with Bologna. The familiarity of clerics with the major intellectual centres and their participation in the Church councils, that of Basel in particular, serves to explain

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<sup>16</sup> ASP, Notai defunti, Ia stanza, G. Randisi 1157; 23 June 1477.

how it was that the Palermitan libraries were so open to new tendencies in devotional and theological life.

## DEVOTION

### *The People of Saints: Tradition and Innovation*

Between the 12th and the 15th century we know of no fewer than 235 churches (172 in the walled town, sixty-three in the countryside), to which we should add seventy-two chapels and *de requie* altars built and dedicated, only two of them in the Conca d'Oro, with in total 320 or so dedications, some altars and churches being dedicated to several different patrons, sometimes competing ones. As is the case throughout Sicily, the Virgin Mary and Nicholas dominate, Mary having thirty-six dedications and Nicholas twenty-eight. The Virgin was especially venerated in the Cassaro, with no less than thirteen churches being dedicated to her. This veneration was, to begin with, official: eight monastic institutions, almost all of them nunneries, two priories and two mendicant convents (the Carmelite monastery and Santa Maria di Gesù), and also eight hospitals. But the Virgin was venerated in several distinct ways, sometimes tenderly (Annunziata, Candelora), sometimes in a manner linked to the worship of her various images (the Madonna dell'Itria, Our Lady of Grace, of Mercy, of Childbirth, of the Souls Commended to God, of Succour, of Victory, of the Angels). Nicholas was likewise popular in the Cassaro (five churches) and in the Conca d'Oro (eight, one of them a Greek monastery, at Churchuro/Ambleri). As throughout Sicily, he was the saint who offered his protection to parish churches, such as the Greek church in the Kalsa, and both of the two parish churches, Greek and Latin, in the Albergheria.

It was rare to encounter invocations of the divine persons, this being the case in only nine churches, and it was a characteristic feature of the royal quarter of the Galca (Santa Fede, Santissima Trinità de Coperta) and of the palaces (Trinità della Zisa). The saints of the Gospel and the Apostolic college appear to be primordial mediators: no less than 55 dedications, scattered throughout all the different quarters of the city. The saint bishops, on the other hand, and saints from the second half of the Middle Ages, were few and far between, which indicates an essentially conservative devotion: barely five churches dedicated to the former, Cataldo and Leucio, saints from southern Italy, Denis, a saint of the French monarchy, and six churches dedicated to modern saints, Thomas of Canterbury,



brought in by the Norman monarchy, and Albert, Clare, Dominic, Francis, Peter Martyr, called upon to protect mendicant convents or confraternities linked to their orders. The majority of the dedications were therefore to the martyrs: no fewer than eighty-seven, the most popular being Barbara, George, Theodore, Agatha, the Forty Martyrs, Lucia, Christopher, Sebastian. Palermo thus remained loyal to a constellation of devotions elaborated during the Norman period and hardly modified subsequently, and partly fixed to, and congealing around the relics possessed by the Cathedral and the Cappella Palatina, namely, the arms of Agatha, of Sebastian, of Blaise and of Fabian, the head of Leonardo, and parts from Barbara, Christopher, from Cosmas and Damian, and from Lucia. But the presence of the shrine of Cristina, that of the sword of Constantine, and the reception in 1398 of the relics of Cono, a late saint from Naso in Valdemona, do not seem to have had any impact.

The names of Palermitan boats reflect particular aspects of the worship of saints, associated no doubt with the protection they were expected to offer: Anthony, Julian and Nicholas were protectors, while Santa Maria della Scala (1351) reflected a Messinian devotion peculiar to sailors; Olivia was a saint adopted by Palermo, and Santa Maria dell'Itria a devotion created in Sicily, in 1365. Study of the representations of the saints in Palermitan painting and sculpture would also lead to a more nuanced account, since they make manifest the popularity of figures who were not chosen as the patrons of churches: universal saints such as Ursula, present early on, since 1346, and associated with a good death, Cecilia, Restituta, the Pisan hermit Ranieri, Queen Elizabeth of Thuringia, imported by the Teutonic Knights of the Magione, Louis of Toulouse, an Angevin prince linked to the Aragonese dynasty, Bernardino of Sienna, and various local saints, such as Ninfa, Olivia, Rosalia, Venera.

The religious plurality of the city in the 12th century delayed its adoption of a municipal patron: whereas Catania very early, around 1130, rediscovered Saint Agatha, and Syracuse, for its part, Lucia, Palermo remained up until the 17th century torn between a number of imported devotions, to Cristina, Olivia and Agatha with no single one of them gaining the upper hand. Palermo, being poor in ancient saints, participated in the creation of Marian devotions based upon images: the Itria, the figure of the pregnant Virgin transported by four old men, the Madonna of Succour, armed with a club and shielding a child from a demon, the Madonna of the Chain, who freed prisoners.

*Sacramental Life and Devotions**The Final Journey*

Wills and testaments are a particularly rich source of information regarding choices of burial-place and of the accompanying rituals. The testator sometimes reveals that he had taken communion and received the last rites. The body of the dead person was washed (a company of lay sisters of St. Francis took responsibility for this in the case of women), and then waked: a group of four or six monks (Carmelites, Franciscans, Dominicans, brothers of S. Martino delle Scale) recited psalms. Sometimes a meal would be served in the evening. The burial would take place on the day of the death, or the following day, if there was no time in the evening, after a distribution to the poor and an office. Some testators made provision for a coffin, others for a pall. The clergy from the Cathedral and the parish churches, and confraternities of discipline were bidden to the ceremony with their crosses, borne by their deacon, while the bells of their churches rang the passing-bell. Some appropriated legacies sustained the demand for such ceremonial. On the other hand, some noteworthy wills, five of them between 1430 and 1449, stipulated that the burial be by night and limited the number of crosses to one or to three (the jurist Ardoino de Geremia, in 1440, steeped in Dominican observance), and likewise the number of bells (just one for the notary Giovanni de Lippo, in 1430, who was buried in the monastery of the same observance). Signs of an ascetic piety having been interiorized—as in the case of Nicola Scuriunu, who in 1435 asked to be buried “naked, upon two bundles of vine-shoots”—are exceptional.

Requests for “honorific” obsequies were rarer still: thus, only two testatrices wished for hired mourners, or *reputatrices*. Conversely, from 1419 to 1431, we note a wave of opposition to the practice: a group of testators and testatrices ban the “ripitu” and the flute players. The urban elite thus relayed the perennial efforts of Court and Church to combat pagan “superstitions.” In 1330, Federico III banned *tenaciter* songs of mourning within the house, at church and the place of burial; the municipality, in 1330 and in 1346, authorized them only on the day of the death, and up until the burial; it permitted them again in 1401 and in 1414, “depending upon the rank of the deceased,” therefore reserving them for nobles, but then banned them again in 1421. The municipal statutes of 1341 and of 1347, with a view to combating the pride of the nobles, limited the use of candles at funerals and forbade relatives to assemble for offices punctuating the journey of the soul and the decomposition of the body, on the ninth

and the fortieth days after the obit and the birthday, days that wills chose, together with All Souls' Day, for distributions of bread, wine and meat to the poor. Such restrictions must have seemed bitter indeed, given the universally shared symbolic context, within which light represented the Resurrection and the poor man the figure of the suffering Saviour.

Trust in the emancipatory power of the celebration of the Eucharist was crucial, and it was manifested first of all in the relative abundance of intercessory masses. There was nothing "flamboyant" here: the number of celebrations remained under control, save for the wills of the aristocracy and some members of the merchant elite. On average, depending upon the decade in question, Palermitans requested between thirty-six and 184 masses, that is one or two, until six, cycles of thirty, plus some supplementary masses. The merchants launched the movement, with 960 masses for Margherita, the wife of Giacomo Ricii, in 1306, and 510 for Syri Giacomo Belingeri in 1348. The nobles were then just as ostentatious: 10,340 masses for Giovanni de Calvellis in 1337, and 4,615 for dame Filippa de Milite in 1348. Only pious followers of the Observance persisted in requesting such high numbers, among them the jurist Ardoino Geremia, in 1440, with 1,420 masses. The most popular cycles were those of Saint Gregory, prescribed by 318 testators, of the Virgin, requested in 224 wills, of Saint Catherine, in 111 wills, of the Holy Ghost, in twenty-seven, of Saint Amadour, in fifteen; but we encounter no fewer than eighteen others requested in smaller numbers; the great variety of choices made by testators within one and the same notary's register proves that notarial formulae did not determine the selection. The sheer diversity of the invocations, ranging from Ursula to the Trinity, Julian, Thomas, Margaret, the Magdalene, Macarius, Barbara, Michael and James, serves to underline the individual character of the devotion. The majority of these cycles were associated with the notion of the good death, and with the role of psychopomp attributed to the angels and to Michael or to James, while the "auxiliaries," Catherine, Margaret or Barbara, already play a by no means negligible role, since they are named in 114 requests out of 738, that is, 15%.

A significant number of wills, thirteen in the 14th century, twenty between 1400 and 1460, ordain the fashioning of instruments of worship for churches, such as chalices, silver censers, ampullas, tabernacles and of chasubles and other priestly vestments, altar cloths, all things centred upon the celebration of the Eucharist. Around 1450, the testators contributed to the great movement promoting the building of monumental tabernacles, in the chapels dedicated to the Holy Sacrament; they also made provision,

in two phases, for the purchase of large candles, torches, to follow the *Corpus Christi* procession.

The choice of burial place, whether it be a personal or family tomb or else a confraternity charnel-house, might also be linked to the act of worship: seventeen wills opted for burial in a private chapel with an altar, five for a place before the main altar, and two in front of the baptismal fonts. Noteworthy, though none too common (eight instances), were those wills that requested a burial place at the door to the church, a choice that no doubt combined humility with a reference to Christ as a “door.” Finally, on six different occasions, the testator had an altar or a chapel built, and endowed it with a chaplaincy.

There was also a close link between the burial place and the holy image: in the 14th century a handful of wills, twelve in number, made provision for the painting of pictures, while others provided for the placing of sepulchres beneath images or again for the upkeep of perpetually burning lamps which would illuminate them. The figures of the mediator saints, Cosmas, Julian and Nicholas, are rare by contrast with the Saviour and his mother, the objects of prayer: crucifix, Madonna and Child, Annunciations. Between 1400 and 1460, twenty-eight testators mention an image, twenty-two of them in order to commission its fabrication and eight in order to fix their place of burial in close proximity to it. The figures described are always the crucified Christ, the Virgin, and three figures of saints only, namely, George, Leonard and Peter. A wish is also expressed that some holy image be accompanied to the obsequies, flanked by the crosses of the parish churches and the confraternities.

### *Everyday Piety*

Palermitan inventories are rife with the signs of everyday piety, and thus shed light on the culture we call “material.” Objects are invariably present. Thus, the icon, its “palio” of silk, generally of cendal, its frontal of velvet and cotton, and the perpetual lamp illuminating it, were the decorative elements in the room. Around 1450, devotion in the name of Jesus began to blossom: a gilded plate “with the name of Jesus” in 1450, and at Gaston Moncada’s house, in 1455, aside from a portable chapel, two icons, some priest’s vestments, a handbell, a veronica and a “volto santo” made of leather, a parchment with the monogram IHS. Another object, though still rare in the 14th century, was ubiquitous in the 15th, namely, the rosary, the paternoster made of beads of coral, jade, silver or of gold thread, separated by silver buttons and pearls or by small crosses, and ending in a

cross, a button or a coral button. The religious purpose of such objects was obvious, namely, the recitation of the Hail Mary, interspersed with the Lord's Prayer, though one should not forget its decorative function, nor the prophylactic role of coral. Other luxury items reflect a gradually more intense display of devotion, an *agnus Dei* in gilded or enamelled silver, suspended from a piece of silk braid or from a little chain of silver thread, a *domina* in gold thread, with pearls and a cross made of pearls, small crosses made of silver and often gilded, or more rarely a coral or amber cross, with a chain so that it could be worn as a necklace, or again a small cross of crystal lined with silver and mounted on a silver base.

Finally, one in three Palermitan inventories listed a book enabling its owner to follow the office, in most cases an office of the Virgin, but there were few books of Hours. Books of piety, found at an earlier date in manuscript form and confined then to the inventories of the aristocracy and the civic nobility (Bibles, Legends of the Saints, Lives of the Fathers, Vices and Virtues, the Revelations of Saint Brigid), proliferated after the invention of printing and spread into the milieu of merchants, shopkeepers and stonemasons. These were usually edifying works in Tuscan by Domenico Cavalca, Girolamo Manfredi or Savonarola, along with the sermons of fra Roberto Caracciolo and of Michele Carcano. In libraries belonging to Palermitans there is no sign of the hegemony of Observant and Scotist thought evident in the interior of Sicily, even if the hostility towards Judaism characteristic of Scotism is perceptible: the strong Dominican currents (in particular, a preoccupation with the rosary), a degree of curiosity about heresy, some modest aspirations towards reform, and the disappearance of Lullism together reflect a calmer mood, at variance with the deeper anxieties of the 14th century.<sup>17</sup>

### *The Rhythms of Devotional Life*

The Customs of Palermo, in conjunction with municipal and private accounts, enable us to compile a succinct calendar of devotional life. The routines of everyday existence were punctuated by Sundays, the solemn celebration of Christmas and Easter, Pentecost, Corpus Christi, the festivals of the Virgin, 15 August, 8 September, 2 February, 25 March, and those

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<sup>17</sup> References in Henri Bresce, *Livre et société en Sicile (1299–1499)*, Centro di Studi filologici e linguistici siciliani, Supplementi al Bollettino, 3 (Palermo, 1971) and "Nota introduttiva," to Pietro Scardilli and Sebastiano Venezia, eds., *Incunaboli delle biblioteche comunali della provincia di Enna* (Palermo, 2010), pp. 1–28.

of the Apostles, and of the Evangelists, Epiphany, and the Feast of Saint John the Baptist. No work was done on such days; long holidays (seven days after Christmas, fourteen around Easter) suspended all activity in the courts and celebratory meals (meat and wine) were distributed to the shepherds for Christmas, Shrove Tuesday and Easter. The obligations were determined by the statutes of the Confraternity of S. Nicola, in 1343: two confessions and two communions a month, along with the three most important festivals, Christmas, Easter and Mid-August.

Wills and contracts allow us to eavesdrop upon rural festivals and fairs, which were tied in to the rhythms of rural production and exchange, and reflected the need for holidays and entertainment; as an occasion of festive consumption, the “pardon” would bring sellers of sesame nougat (*cubayta*) to the fore. In the environs of Palermo, devotion sent people to Monreale, to Monte S. Giuliano (Erice) for the mid-August festival of the Madonna, at the Annunziata in Trapani, to S. Calogero de Sciacca, to Santa Maria de l'Ognina in Catania and also to churches which kept alive the collective memory of abandoned sites, such as S. Cosmano de Iato, attested in 1466, when the danger of plague led to the May pilgrimage being banned. More modest wishes involved spaces nearer at hand: the old Greek church of S. Michele de Indulcis, the hospital of S. Leonardo outside the walls, S. Martino delle Scale and Santa Maria di Gesù.

When greater distances were involved, Palermitans would set out for, or send representatives to, the major sites of pilgrimage, as thirty or so wills testify, to Rome, particularly in 1350, 1375 and 1390, in 1450 and in 1493, and four to Saint James of Compostella, and finally others to S. Michele of the Gargano (in 1416) and to Jerusalem (in 1416 and in 1493). At the end of the 15th century Our Lady of Loretto made her appearance. The dates announced for pilgrimages reflect Palermitans' awareness of major turning-points in the Catholic faith. Generally speaking, the pilgrims' departures were linked to Roman jubilees, to the return of the Avignon Papacy to Rome and to the end of the Schism.

### *Communal Piety*

The link between the municipality and the ecclesial institutions, which had provided the communal movement with a framework at the end of the 13th and the beginning of the 14th century was ancient and well-established: the parish church of S. Giacomo la Marina, then the parvis of Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio, and finally the stairs of Santa Caterina welcomed the general assemblies of the citizens, while the quarter of the

Galca met in 1287 in the atrium of S. Bartolomeo. Collaboration between the municipality and the Palermitan church was close: the Cathedral was the property of the commons, and it therefore provided a shelter for communal time; the Commune was responsible for the curfew bell, and later for the clock, paying the wages of bell-ringer and clockmaker alike. Municipal control over the religious sphere was not total, however, as it was in the south of France and Provence. In Palermo the archbishop's palace and the Vestry continued to administer their own property and revenues, but the municipality built the cathedral's imposing bell-tower in the 14th century, with legacies bequeathed by citizens and money from the *luminaria*, thereby establishing an altogether original model of a civic religion which was grafted on to the sensibilities of ordinary Palermitans. Between 1306 and 1348, eight testators included among their legatees the bell-tower fund, while five others bequeathed sums for the upkeep of the city walls and two for that of the roads; yet others made provision for the repair or building of a bridge. These expressions of civic piety coincided to a remarkable extent with the apogee of the communal movement and of the Palermitan "Popolo."

From 1310, under pressure from the Constitutions of Federico III, the Palermitan municipality took part in the great and general project of harmonising ordinary morality with the rules of the Church. The Constitutions, which took their inspiration from Arnaldo de Villanova, sought to remove all opportunities for committing the gravest sins, by banning dice and gambling for money, incantations and divination, by rendering slavery more humane, and by restoring strict hierarchies in the sphere of authority, as regards dress and the bearing of arms, matters serving to distinguish Christians and infidels, nobles and commoners. The municipal ordinances of 1340 and of 1346 ruled that luxury should be the preserve of chivalry, but placed severe restrictions upon it. It was not simply a matter of reducing expenditure—as the "bourgeois" rationality of the texts suggests—nor just of reinforcing the juridical and social hierarchies, but indeed of making Palermo into a city exempt from sin, devoted to penitence, a new and holy Jerusalem. It was the Commune that took the initiative here, and not the Church.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Michele De Vio, *Felicitas et fidelissima urbis Panormitanæ . . . Privilegia, Palermo*, 1706, p. 161 (1340) and Giuseppe La Mantia, "Su i più antichi Capitoli della città di Palermo dal secolo XII al XIV e su le condizioni della città medesima negli anni 1354 al 1392," *Archivio storico siciliano* n. s. XL (1915–1916), 390–444, p. 438 (1346).

*Economic Morality and Familial Morality*

Wills first of all shed light on economic morality, testifying to the fact that the condemnation of usury had penetrated consciences, though usury itself featured only very rarely in the Palermitan economy: two in five testators, and one in five testatrices, made compensation for the *male ablata*, sums falsely acquired, while reserving a small sum, from two to fifteen tari, for the poor or for the upkeep of the Cathedral. Sometimes, a large sum, from 2 to 50 onze, indicates a smarting memory of having acted unjustly. Some designate the persons wronged, a Jewish dealer in flour in 1341, the owners of livestock requisitioned for the army in 1345, some women to whom the testatrix had lent small sums in 1361. Others provide for the reimbursement of sums of interest concealed within the normal and general mechanism of advance purchase: in 1306 the difference was made good between the price paid and what the cotton in the plain of Terranova was then worth at harvest; in 1307 the price of grain at harvest was taken into account and, in 1426, the price of the must at the grape harvest. In 1364, it was the other way round, for then it was the interest received on the sale of corn on credit that was paid back. Finally, in 1352, a testatrix stipulated that she should receive no interest from her debtors.

In the sphere of familial morality, on the other hand, Palermo presents the image of a profoundly tolerant society: young nobles, priests and clerics had concubines, known as *ganee*; genuine contracts of concubinage joined couples together in the presence of a notary, and amicable separations occurred, though they had to be sanctioned by the archdeacon's jurisdiction. A widely held view was expressed, in very naive terms, by an already married freedwoman who wished to marry an Iberian man: it is one's will that makes a marriage. Married men did not conceal their bastards and their wives would sometimes look after them. Out of 660 masculine wills, some sixty or so, or almost one in ten, made provision for a legacy or dowry for one or two natural children, most of them very probably the sons or daughters of slaves, and several testators designate a concubine as universal legatee or testamentary executrix. These fathers were immigrants, merchants and soldiers, but also men of the Church, a bishop of Patti, for example, who had been ordained late and was moreover a widower, a sub-chantor, a canon, an Augustine friar and a Hospitaller. This would have been deemed a failure, had the Church persevered with its attempts to Christianize morality, a task which remained unfinished.



## THE SPACE OF DEVOTION

Around the city the numerous churches scattered across the Conca d'Oro (numbering forty-nine, along with nine monasteries and six hospitals) were called upon to draw down blessings upon harvests and to ensure the protection of the workers. Chance factors account for the irregular nature of such a network. But there was a definite tendency to adopt saints who were specialists in protection and intercession, fostered perhaps by the influence of the Magione and the Teutonic Knights, who had thus created a clearly defined corps of auxiliary saints, as in Germanic countries: with thirteen churches out of seventy-two, or one in five, being dedicated to them.<sup>19</sup> The foundation of country hospitals also had a pacificatory function: the prior hospital of Sant'Anna delle Scale di S. Martino and the neighbouring church of S. Matteo, entrusted in 1295 to the Continents, were explicitly designed to keep the peace in places "where thieves were active."

*The Religious Anchorage of Civic Liturgies*

Royal ritual left its mark on Palermo, the seat of coronation ceremonies from Roger II up until the Aragonese kings, and always, in theory, the "seat of the crown."<sup>20</sup> Coronation, which followed universally accepted rules, took place on a pivotal day in the liturgical calendar, linked to the Marian cycle, the Purification, 2 February—in 1286 for James II—and the Annunciation, which for his brother Peter II chanced to fall also on Easter Day, but without any prelates or ecclesiastics, on account of the interdict. Coronation and royal entry could be combined with the holding of a parliament, a ceremony which in 1316 took place in the cathedral of Palermo, in order to mark the renewal of the symbolic tie with the Norman monarchy.

Royal festivals, martial and dynastic celebrations invariably involved the main sites of civic piety: when the Turkish peril, in 1480, prompted the holding of a procession in order to implore the Virgin's aid "contro li crudilissimi Turcki et infidili," it made its way, on 10 September, from the Magione of the Teutonic Knights to the old Norman church of Santa Maria la Pinta and to the Cathedral, retracing the route of the *Corpus Christi* procession.

<sup>19</sup> Two to Barbara, Christopher, Margaret and Sebastian, and one to Catherine, Erasmus, Guy (Vito) and Leonard, the protector of prisoners.

<sup>20</sup> Henri Bresk, "Commune et citoyenneté dans la Sicile des derniers siècles du Moyen Âge," *Rivista Internazionale di Diritto Comune* 18 (2007), 169–196.

The municipality, for its part, organised an unending series of festivals and processions linked to the civic function of religion, the processions of the *Corpus Christi* and of the saints that gave their protection to the city. The Senate decided the routes and sometimes the dates, convoked the citizens and the organizations of piety whose task it was to frame the procession, namely, the monasteries and convents, and the houses of discipline, all barefoot, the consuls of the “Arti” at the head of those they administered; it dictated the schedules and the details of the display, sermon and sung Mass. Shops and workshops had to shut. The *luminaria* was obligatory: citizens were invited to illuminate their houses at one and the same time, half an hour after dark. The procession and the illumination thus served to express the unity of the city; unanimity, consensus and collective identity were the order of the day.

The commune concentrated the political devotion of citizens upon the Virgin, the patron of the cathedral, and in 1340 prohibited their taking part in any of the fractional *luminaria*, either of the different quarters or of the confraternities; only the members of confraternities were authorized to carry their own candles, except when special invitations were issued. Competition between saints or quarters, and opportunities for conflict, were thus avoided. The main festival, around the cathedral, was a solemn *luminaria*, obligatory for all, convoked shortly after midday on 15 August. One and all had to appear with their candle or torch, follow their quarter’s or confraternity’s candle, and pay their contribution. The commune’s insistence nevertheless allows us to glimpse zones of opposition and reticence. In Palermo, it yielded the commune eleven quintals of wax in 1325, to a value of around 250 florins.

From 1465 on, the *palio* of the Assumption solemnized the festival of the Virgin in a manner that was at once joyful, unifying, ironical and agonistic: it involved four races, black slaves, freed servants, a cavalcade of mares and a boat race. Then, in 1476, a boys’ race, together with a donkey race, a light horse race, and finally a swimming race were added. Finally in 1479 three days of competition were included, more warlike in spirit, between crossbowmen at the Porta dei Greci. The success of such ventures demonstrates the city’s capacity to invent traditions, there being a continuous series of initiatives staged within a clearly defined, marked out space, running from the Porta Termini, close to the Magione, to the Loggia dei Catalani, and in the zone near to the sea, from Sant’Erasmo to the port.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

The other civic ceremonies were processions: first and foremost the *Corpus Christi*, the festival of the Eucharist, which followed a well-established model and doubtless dated back to the end of the thirteenth century. The populace, having assembled at the Teutonic Knights' the Magione, followed a fixed route along the "famous" streets, which were decorated with silks and boughs of myrtle, among them the Ruga di Pisa, which had been paved by drapers, both Christians and Jews, then, nearing the cathedral, the Via Marmorea del Cassaro, the probable site of the ceremonies of state of the Norman kingdom, with the royal entry there first being attested in 1177. Corpus-Christi followed the same route as the royal festival, a route dotted with ancient churches, Sant'Antonio all'Amalfitania, Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio, the Cancelliere and Salvatore monasteries, whereas S. Francesco, on the Ruga di Pisa, was the centre for the new piety.

#### *"Advocate" Saints*

The processions in honour of saints that were "advocates" and protectors of the city were on the other hand diversified, but held on more or less fixed dates. Palermo had in fact never chosen a patron: at the beginning of the 14th century, the commune favoured Cristina, whose relics had been brought in by the Norman monarchy, and associated here with an intense monarchical devotion. Her relics were mobilized on Friday 30 December 1328 in a procession of rogations for the cure of King Federico III and of his son and co-King Pietro II, both of them being ill. The procession of the reliquary, having set out from the cathedral, went by way of the central street in the Cassaro and then reached Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio (the Martorana), where the commune held its assemblies. The sermon which then followed occurred at one and the same time in the church, on the square of S. Cataldo adjoining it, and in the Praetorian Palace where the Commune met. In 1348 Palermo obtained the privilege of a month-long "general fair" held on either side of 24 July, the festival of Saint Cristina. The procession of relics was still attested in 1476, on Sunday 13 October, when there was the festival of the Translation. From 1478 onwards the ceremony was shifted to May, but was still held on a Sunday, and the lack of a fixed day shows that Cristina was not firmly rooted in the city. The itinerary linked the quarters of the Cassaro, of the Albergheria and of the Conceria: from the cathedral, by way of the Ballarò and the Feravecchia, it joined up with the route of the *Corpus*. An alternative itinerary, in 1486, included the Seralcadi, doubtless in order to involve other quarters.

The introduction of Agatha was effected with great solemnity in 1482: the proclamation invoked her Palermitan origin and called her *nostra speciali advocata et patrana*. It convoked, for the religious mass, monasteries and disciplines on 5 February, at the church of Sant'Agata fuori le mura, one of the saint's halts on her way to Catania. The procession entered the city by Porta Sant'Agata and rejoined the route of the *Corpus-Christi* procession by way of Ruga de li Perguli, la Feravecchia and la Loggia, thus reaching the cathedral, which is but a few steps away from the old church of Sant'Agata alla Guilla. This itinerary centred upon the Albergheria was immediately abandoned, in 1485, and replaced in 1487 with a shorter one: from the Carmelite monastery, it climbed directly to the Cassaro. This new route no longer involved the lower part of the city. In 1499, on the other hand, the route was extended, descending from la Guilla to Sant'Agata del Seralcadi, detta degli Scurruggi, to Sant'Agostino and to the Banchi, thence returning to the cathedral along the Cassaro, thereby taking in the whole of the city.

Finally, the admission of Olivia, an adopted Tunisian saint, into the group of "advocate" saints, occurred without any fuss. In 1487, and in the following year, a proclamation declared what the boundaries of a *palio* for 10 June were to be: from the church of S. Giacomo la Marina to that of Sant'Oliva fuori le mura, by way of S. Domenico, Sant'Agostino and the Capo so as to leave the city through Porta Carini. Collective devotion once again found a popular, athletic and agonistic expression. The Senate made provision neither for the price nor for the expenses of organizing this event; it simply accorded recognition to what was a spontaneous creation, although it did arrange for the street to be widened.

### *Specialized Protectors*

The ceremonial and festive space of the city was thus extended: the quarter of Seralcadi, up until then neglected, was traversed by a new and exclusive *palio*. But it was sickness, plague, the threat of the Turk and climatic catastrophes that led the Senate to organize processions which gradually integrated the whole space of the city, and which frequent epidemics rendered annual after 1483, with the route being changed every year and churches and saints being combined in such a way as to multiply the number of intercessions, in a penitential atmosphere characterized by a break with the usual order of civic time. In 1486, drought led the Senate to adopt—or to dust off—the three days of the Rogations, unknown moreover in medieval Sicily, a triple procession from the Monday to the

Wednesday of Ascension, which probably went outside of the walled city in order to go and bless the fields, in accordance with universal tradition. Conversely, on 15 June 1483, a great procession asked for an end to a rainy season which presaged poor harvests and expensive corn. Summoned in the morning to the cathedral, the citizens went to the Great Hospital to hear the mass of *Corpus-Christi* and that of the Holy Spirit, the symbol of the relationships of fraternity and equality existing between the members of the mystical body of the Christian city, and the ideal figure of the municipal community.

The frequency of outbreaks of the plague finally led the municipality, in 1481, to enlist Saint Mark: the procession summoned on 25 April, Saint Mark's day, took an original route, from the cathedral to S. Marco al Seralcadi, the Venetians' church, to Sant'Agostino and as far as S. Giacomo la Marina, then returning to the cathedral by way of the Cassaro. The choice then fell upon Sebastian, whose arm was in the city's possession. In 1483 Sebastian's festival was regarded as an "apostle's festival," and therefore a holiday: summoned to attend mass, in the morning, at the Annunziata di Porta S. Giorgio, the procession then went to the nearby, small church of S. Sebastiano fuori le mura, which had been restored at the time of the plague of 1422. The following year, an ambitious route led from the Annunziata to the Loggia before climbing back up the Cassaro to the church of S. Sebastiano being built on the "piano" of Santa Maria la Pinta, near to the Palace. It linked up again with the old triumphal itinerary towards the upper town and placed Sebastian in a dominant position between cathedral and royal palace. In 1485, the route was completed by a final descent to the port, the Cala, where a third church dedicated to the Intercessor, S. Sebastiano alla Marina, was built; the itinerary was dedicated to the seven joyful mysteries of the Virgin, with stations at the chapel of Monserrat di S. Domenico, to Santa Maria la Nova, near to S. Giacomo, in the monastery of the Vergini, to that of the Cancelliere, to Santa Maria la Pinta and to the Cathedral. On 20 January 1486 a third mutation would occur: from the Annunziata to S. Sebastiano alla Marina, thus to the S. Sebastiano under construction in front of la Pinta, ending up at the Magione. Solemn, and "with candles lit," the procession covered the five quarters under its protection and served to confirm popular attachment to the Teutonic Knights' church. The following year, the period of extreme anxiety was over and the procession reverted to the short Annunziata-Marina-Pinta itinerary. In 1488, the procession is not mentioned: devotion followed the curve of epidemics and of collective panics, and its appeal varied with their rise and fall; treated as the equal of the "advocate" saints, such a saint

ceased to be of much interest once the peril was past. In 1494, when the plague took hold once more, Saint Venera was associated with it, placed in her turn in the group of “advocates” and honoured on 26 July, as was Saint Roch, for whom a chapel was built, at S. Sebastiano alla Marina, and a “pardon” organized, on 16 August.

Finally, the city directed and coordinated a procedure of purification and of sanctification. Other sermons were designed to popularize the Crusade of Granada, on 1st June 1486. A short procession went from Sant’Antonio to the cathedral, where fra Giovanni de Pistoia, entrusted with the task of addressing the Jews twenty years previously, was preaching. In case of need, the Senate financed events of general significance which brought a blessing down upon the city: in 1423 the Carmelite monastery received four onze for the general chapter of the order, which was to be held at Palermo.

#### CONCLUSION

The pace with which new devotions were adopted, and the accumulation of distinct forms of piety brought Palermo closer to the other Italian cities. The sheer variety of coexisting religious cultures was noteworthy, but we are first of all struck by the linking and interlocking of devotions and practices, eremitical spirituality and poverty being grafted on to the withered trunk of Greek monachism, the disciplines’ passion for penitence owing its soaring intensity to the hospitallers’ devotion and to mendicant poverty, and establishing itself in the ancient sanctuaries. The sense of continuity and pride in the past were also founded upon the beauty of the city’s monuments, establishing awareness of a golden age contemporary with the Norman monarchy and fostering a project for a renewal combined with the restoration of testimonies from the ideal epoch of “the white mantle of churches.”

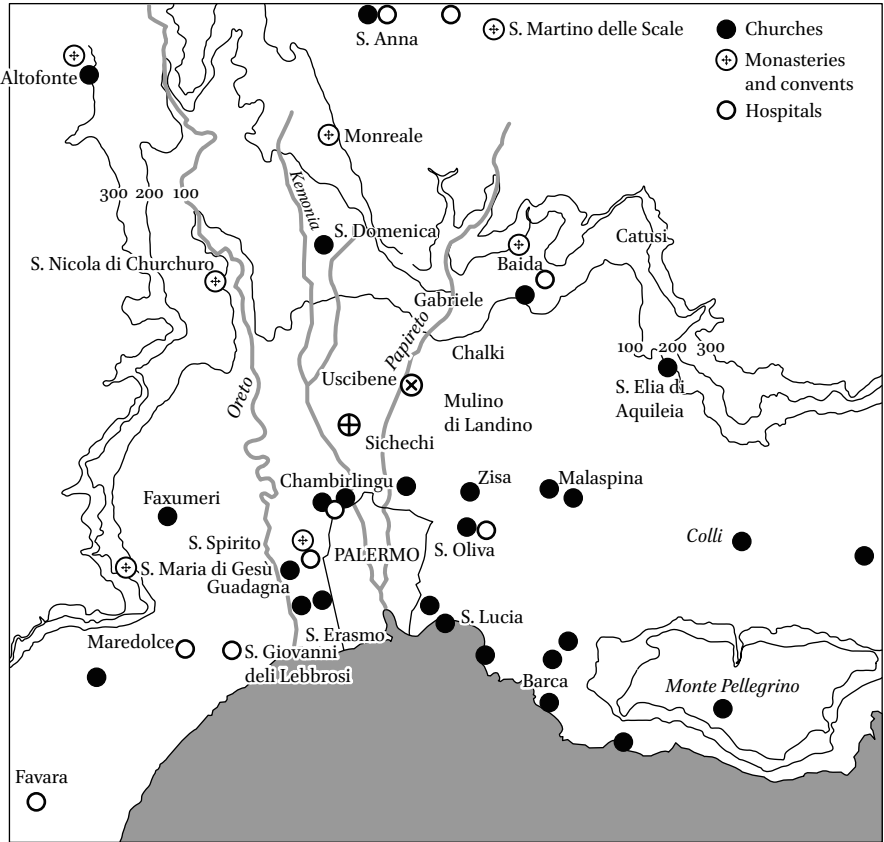


Fig. 12.1. Religious amenities of the Conca d'Oro (XIIth–XVth)

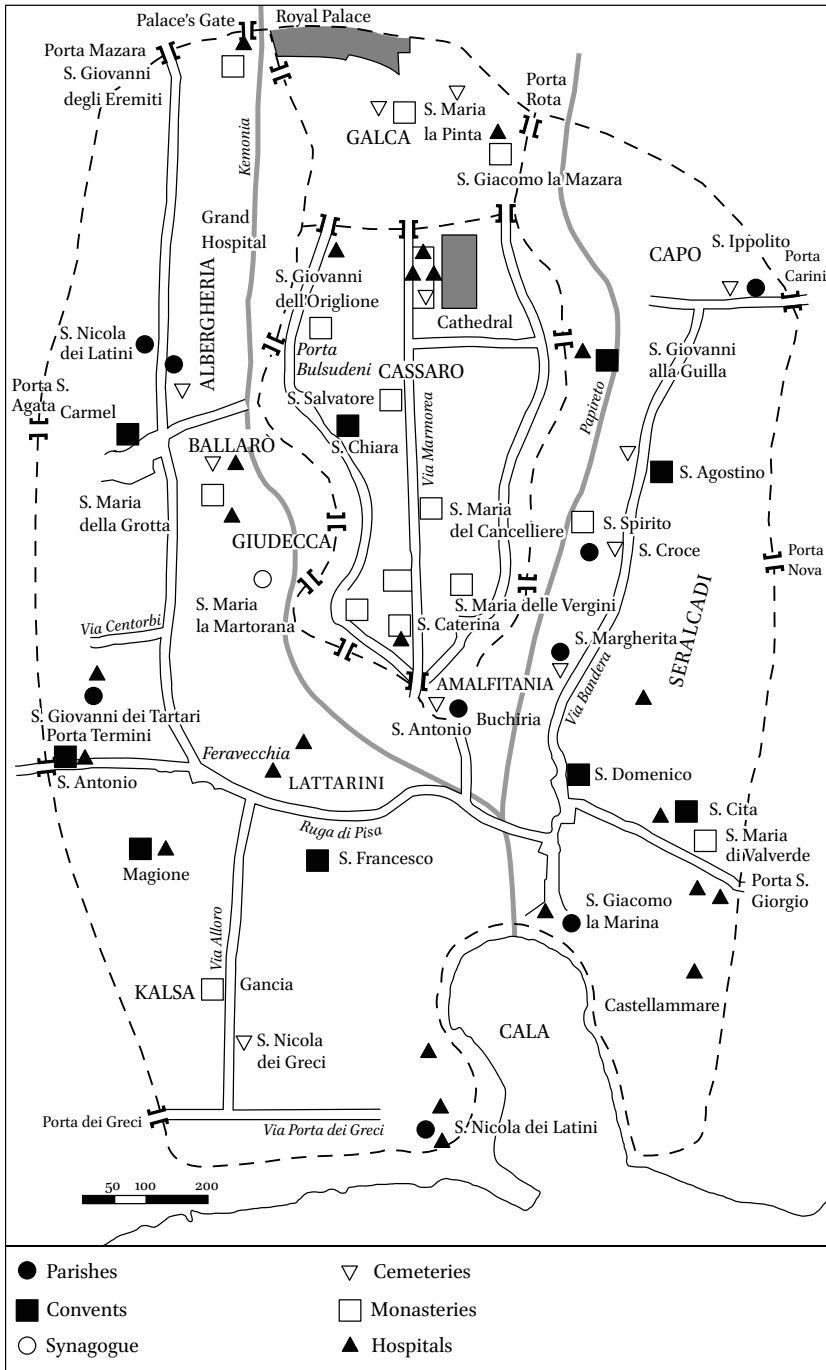


Fig. 12.2. Religious Palermo (XIIth–XVth centuries)



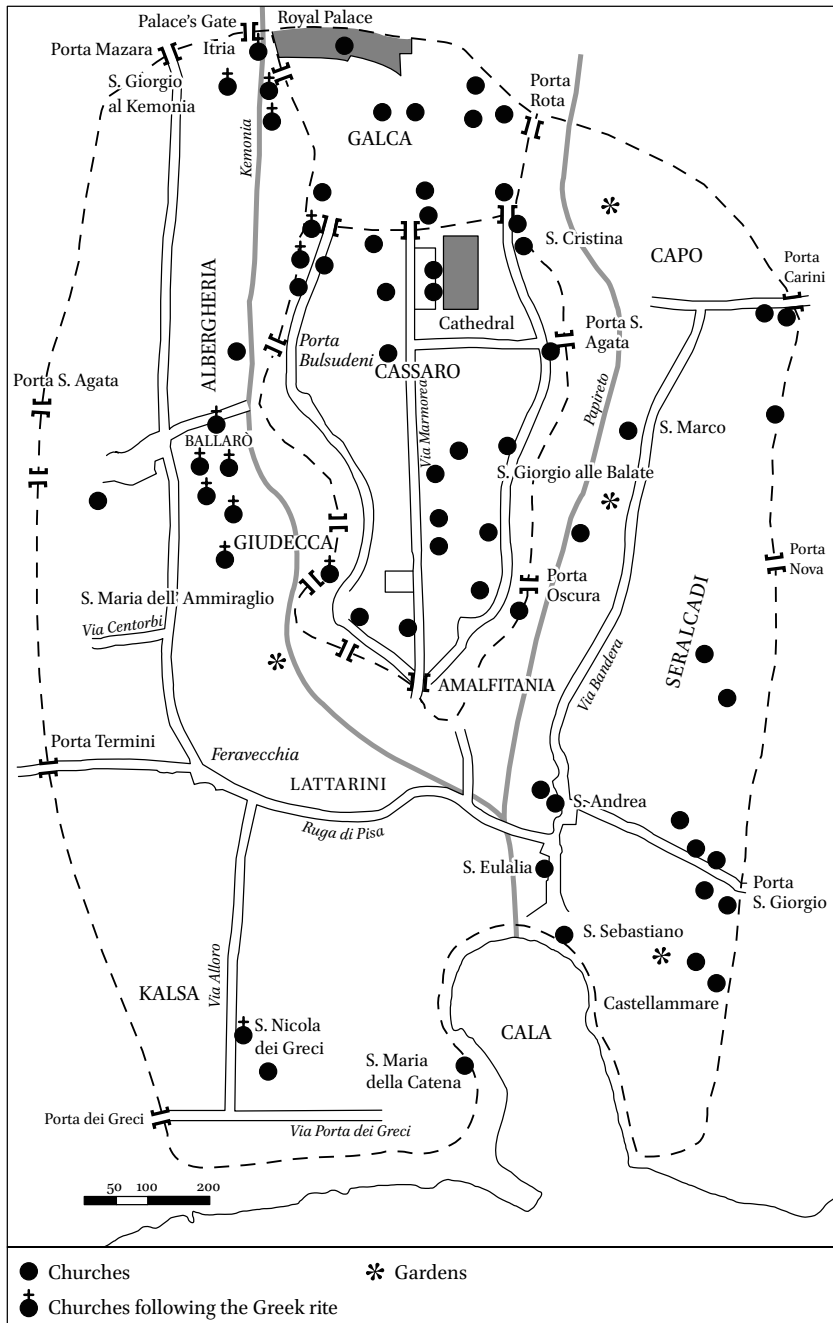


Fig. 12.3. Churches of Palermo (XIIth–XVth centuries)

## MONREALE FROM ITS ORIGIN TO THE END OF THE MIDDLE AGES

Sulamith Brodbeck

### INTRODUCTION

The monastic complex of Monreale lies ten or so kilometres to the south of Palermo, on the slopes of Mont Caputo overlooking the Conca d'Oro. The last royal foundation of the Norman Hauteville dynasty, this collection of buildings was erected at the behest of King William II (1172–89). Although this latter was a key figure in the history of Sicily, whose death without leaving an heir marked the end of the Norman kingdom of Sicily, his personality has somehow been eclipsed by the glorious reign of Roger II.<sup>1</sup> The cathedral of Monreale forms part of a sequence of royal foundations, such as the Cappella Palatina begun by Roger II, completed by William I, and the church of Cefalù, the first royal cathedral and sponsored by this same king. A grandiose undertaking, William II's foundation vies with the earlier creations as much in its scale as in the richness of

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#### Abbreviations

Borsook: Eve Borsook, *Messages in Mosaic: The Royal Programmes of Norman Sicily, 1130–1187* (Oxford, 1990).

Brodbeck: Sulamith Brodbeck, *Les saints de la cathédrale de Monreale en Sicile. Iconographie, hagiographie et pouvoir royal à la fin du XII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Collection de l'École française de Rome 432 (Rome, 2010).

Del Giudice: Michele Del Giudice, *Descrizione del Real Tempio e monasterio di Santa Maria Nuova di Morreale* (Palerme, 1702).

Demus: Otto Demus, *The Mosaics of Norman Sicily* (London, 1949; repr. New York, 1988).

Gravina: Domenico Benedetto Gravina, *Il Duomo di Monreale* (Palermo, 1859–69).

Kitzinger: Ernst Kitzinger, *Il Duomo di Monreale* (1960; repr. Palermo, 1991).

Lello: Giovanni Luigi Lello, *Historia della chiesa di Monreale* (Rome, 1596; anastatic reprint, Bologna, 1967).

<sup>1</sup> Edoardo D'Angelo, "Suspecta Familiaritas. Sur les rapports entre Guillaume II et Gauthier Ophamil," in Mariella Colin and Marie-Agnès Lucas-Avenel, eds., *De la Normandie à la Sicile: réalités, représentations, mythes (Actes du colloque tenu aux archives départementales de la Manche, 17–19 octobre 2002)* (Saint-Lô, 2004), pp. 79–92, here p. 79; see Salvatore Tramontana, "Sovrani normanni nella coeva cronachistica meridionale," in Jean-Philippe Genet, ed., *L'historiographie médiévale en Europe (Actes du colloque organisé par la Fondation européenne de la science [Standing committee for the humanities], 29 mars–1<sup>er</sup> avril 1989)* (Paris, 1991), p. 147; Annkristin Schlichte, *Der "gute" König. Wilhelm II. von Sizilien (1166–1189)*, Bibliothek des Deutschen Historischen Instituts in Rom 110 (Tübingen, 2005), pp. 319ff for the end of William II's reign; pp. 186–196 for the foundation of Monreale.

its decoration. It is not a simple church but a royal and monastic cathedral, destined to become a dynastic mausoleum and the seat of a powerful archbishopric, rivalling that of Palermo. Every artistic aspect of the structure was designed to express the ambition, the greatness, indeed the excessive nature of the new creation. Architects, sculptors and mosaicists from a wide range of different, often distant regions pooled their skills in order to erect a temple to the glory of God, but also to that of the sovereign and patron. The architecture refers to a Nordic tradition, the capitals in the cloister recall Provençal sculpture, while the mosaics compete with the gold of Byzantium. Nonetheless, it remains a hazardous business to seek to attach each of these forms of artistic expression to a single tradition or to a specific provenance, hence the richness and complexity of this monument which, as we shall see, has so captivated historians of art.

#### A HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF THE CATHEDRAL'S FOUNDATION

The name *Sancta Maria Nova in Monte Regali* derives from the dedication of the church, erected to the glory of the Virgin Mary, from the site the monastery occupies, and from the royal function of the place, which served Roger II as a game reserve. The Cathedral's foundation has given rise to some confusion in the historiography.

In the 19th century, when interest in Siculo-Norman art was gathering pace, the new studies then published were faced with problems of dating which engendered errors of interpretation. Domenico Gravina, on the basis of his observation of the stones in the south wall, concluded that there had been a change in the workforce at a certain point, and formulated the hypothesis that William II had restored an earlier Byzantine church dating from the sixth century.<sup>2</sup> Elaborating upon Gravina's proposal, Fedele Pollaci Nuccio then suggested that the earlier Byzantine church was perhaps one of the seven founded in Sicily by Gregory the Great.<sup>3</sup> This theory was belied by Otto Demus, who, in the mid-twentieth century, pointed out that such variations in construction were to be found in the majority of Romanesque cathedrals.<sup>4</sup> We should therefore take at face value William II's declaration, which we may read in the diploma of

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<sup>2</sup> Gravina, p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> Fedele Pollaci Nuccio, "I papi e la Sicilia nel Medioevo," *Archivio Storico Siciliano* 25 (1900), 53–87.

<sup>4</sup> Demus, p. 99.

15 August 1176, *construere et fundere basilicam*.<sup>5</sup> We cannot determine the precise date upon which the construction of the monastery began, but the king himself said that he had started to build it at the very beginning of his reign, that is to say, in 1172. He specifies that the monastery had to observe the Benedictine rule and that the abbot should be appointed after consultation with the king. The foundation was mentioned for the first time on 1st March 1174, in a charter of Nicholas, Archbishop of Messina, which specifies that the episcopal jurisdiction and the possessions of the monastery of Santa Maria Maniace, erected by Queen Margaret, were ceded to the monastery *quod Dominus noster Guilelmus sanctissimus rex... statuit edificare... prope felicem urbem Panormi*.<sup>6</sup> Pope Alexander III, in his bull of 30 December 1174, expressed his contentment at the news of the foundation of which he had been informed by letters from the king, specified that it was situated *super Sanctam Kiriacam*,<sup>7</sup> and placed it under his authority. Two further clauses were added in the bull of 14 January 1176: the abbot had to be chosen by the bishop or archbishop but with the permission of the king, this latter being the pope's legate, and the monastery had to pay an annual tax of a hundred Sicilian tari to Rome.<sup>8</sup> In that same year, 1176, at the request of William II, the monastic ensemble of Monreale was founded by the Benedictine monks of Cava dei Tirreni, an abbey situated some kilometres north-west of Salerno on the road to Naples. According to the *Chronicon Cavense*, some of the king's representatives set out in the course of 1176 for SS. Trinità di Cava, with a view to asking the abbot to send some monks to the new monastery.<sup>9</sup> In the spring of that same year, or to be precise on 20th March, the eve of the feast of Saint Benedict, the monks arrived in Palermo and were conducted to Monreale, where Theobald became the first abbot of the new community.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>5</sup> The diploma is published in Del Giudice, 3rd part, "Privilegi e bolle," pp. 2–6.

<sup>6</sup> Carlo Alberto Garufi, *Catalogo illustrato del Tabulario di S. Maria Nuova in Monreale*, Documenti per servire alla storia della Sicilia 1st ser., 19 (Palermo, 1902), n°8; Demus, p. 91.

<sup>7</sup> Garufi, *Catalogo illustrato*, n°9, n°10. The abbreviation *sup* in the pope's bull must have been retranscribed as *super*, but it should be understood as *supra*, as the king's diploma indicates, that is to say, "beyond." This term has been the source of some confusion, and certain authors have supposed that Monreale was built upon a pre-existing church. Furthermore, the king's diploma of 1176 speaks of the church of S. Kyriaci as forming part of the property of the monastery of Monreale.

<sup>8</sup> Del Giudice, p. 38.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9, n. 5.

<sup>10</sup> Lello, 2nd part "Vite degli Arcivescovi," p. 9.

This latter only remained at the head of the monastery for two years and passed away on 14 May 1178.<sup>11</sup> Pope Alexander III conferred on the abbot the rights of confirmation and of consecration, together with the right to don the mitre, gloves, sandals, dalmatic, pastoral staff and ring, and to bless after the fashion of bishops.<sup>12</sup> Monreale became an important and powerful bishopric. The first abbot, Theobald, was described as “Episcopus et Abbas” in two charters, and he used this same title when signing the marriage certificate of William II and Joan of England.<sup>13</sup> Abbot William succeeded Theobald until 28th October 1189, the date of his death. In 1183, Pope Lucius III, in the bull *Licet Dominus*, dated 5th February, turned Monreale into an archbishopric. He praised the king for having made such swift progress with the construction (*brevi tempore Templum Domino multa dignum admiratione construxit*), and set great store by the greatness of the foundation, insisting that a like work had not been realised by any king since ancient times (*ut simile opus per aliquem regem factum non fuerit a diebus antiquis*).<sup>14</sup> The pope added that it was not usual to set up two archbishops as close to one another as Palermo and Monreale were, but that the new archbishopric would not infringe upon the rights of the old one, for its possessions already formed an integral part of the episcopal jurisdiction. In 1188, a date which would seem to represent the point at which the archbishopric of Monreale’s influence extended furthest, the abbot-archbishop was at the head of a huge domain: he held properties in the diocese of Mazara, churches and castles in the bishopric of Agrigento, possessions in Messina and yet others in its environs, owing to the authority it wielded over Santa Maria Maniace. He inspected the dioceses of Catania and Syracuse, and had numerous footholds in Calabria, Basilicata and Puglia.

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<sup>11</sup> Lello, p. 10.

<sup>12</sup> Garufi, *Catalogo illustrato*, n°10, p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> The charters of March and April 1177 have been published in, respectively, Del Giudice, pp. 71–73 and Rocco Pirri, *Sicilia sacra disquisitionibus et notitis illustrata...* (Palermo, 1733; anastatic reprint 1987), pp. 456–57, where one may read the signature *Theobaldus indignus Abbas et Episcopus regalis Monasterii S. Mariae Novae*. For the marriage certificate, *ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>14</sup> Del Giudice, p. 40.

*The Archbishopsrics of Palermo and Monreale*

The scholarly literature has represented the archbishopsrics of Palermo and Monreale as having been very much at odds with one another.<sup>15</sup> The archbishop of Palermo, Walter Ophamil,<sup>16</sup> is supposed to have rebuilt the Palermitan cathedral between 1172 and 1185, in open competition with William II's new foundation.<sup>17</sup> Frequent reference has been made by scholars to the tension between Walter and the vice-chancellor Matthew of Ajello, basing such claims upon the chronicle of Richard of San Germano. This latter in fact relates that Matthew of Ajello persuaded King William II to found an archbishopric *ante portas*, with a view to reducing the power and influence of the Palermitan archbishopric.<sup>18</sup> For his part, Walter was supposed to have made his brother Bartholomew a *familiaris regis* in order to counterbalance the weight of William, archbishop of Monreale, and of Matthew of Ajello, both staunch champions of the new archbishopric founded by William II.<sup>19</sup> As Otto Demus has very convincingly shown, the narrative of Richard of San Germano appears to be very biased and does not seem to account for the reality of the situation: "The foundation of a new archbishopric close to the see of Palermo seemed an appropriate means for impairing Walter's power without effecting an open break."<sup>20</sup> Besides, why view the foundation of Monreale as a declaration of hostility towards the diocese of Palermo, when we know that thirty years previously Roger II had chosen Cefalù as his own royal foundation? And why

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<sup>15</sup> Ferdinand Chalandon, *Histoire de la domination normande en Italie et en Sicile* (Paris, 1907; anastatic reprint, New York, 1960), 2:387; Lynn Townsend White, *Latin Monasticism in Norman Sicily*, Medieval Academy of America 31 (Cambridge, 1938), Italian translation, *Il monachesimo latino nella Sicilia normanna* (Catania, 1984), p. 203; Borsook, p. 51; William Melczer, *La porta di Bonanno a Monreale: teologia e poesia*, Il labirinto 9 (Palermo, 1987), p. 48.

<sup>16</sup> The name "Ophamil" or "of the Mill" must be a distortion of the Greek version of Gautier's title, "Ho protofamiliaros." Its English origin has been disputed by L. J. A. Loewenthal, "For the Biography of Walter Ophamil, archbishop of Palermo (1169–1190)," *The English Historical Review* 87 (1972), 5–82.

<sup>17</sup> "In both cases, and especially at Monreale, there was evident a definite political antagonism towards the archiepiscopal see of Palermo, that is to say, in favour of their own ecclesiastical foundation," Wolfgang Krönig, "La cattedrale nella cultura europea," in Leonardo Urbani, *La cattedrale di Palermo, Studi per l'ottavo centenario dalla fondazione* (Palermo, 1993), pp. 293–301, here p. 301.

<sup>18</sup> Demus, p. 152, n. 59. See Richard de San Germano, *Ryccardi de Sancto Germano notarii Chronica*, ed. Carlo Alberto Garufi, RIS 7 / 2 (Bologne, 1937).

<sup>19</sup> Hiroshi Takayama, "Familiars regis and the Royal Inner Council in Twelfth-Century Sicily," *The English Historical Review* 104 (1989), 357–372, here p. 367.

<sup>20</sup> Demus, p. 96.

see in the reconstruction of the cathedral of Palermo a desire to compete with Monreale, when all the indications are that the devastating effects of an earthquake in 1169 had meant that it had to be rebuilt in the 1170s? It nonetheless remains the case that relations between the two diocese remained strained, as did those between Walter and King William II.<sup>21</sup> One wonders to what extent the foundation of Monreale was linked to the unhappy reign of William I, which was marked by revolts, and the turbulent regency of Margaret of Navarre. In this reading its foundation would be the fruit of a deliberate plan on the part of the new sovereign, who, rather than being opposed to the Palermitan archbishop, seemed to aspire to a re-establishment of royal authority, of its credibility, and of its exercise in the kingdom, on the model of his grandfather Roger II. It nonetheless remains the case that the choice of Monreale was far from being fortuitous, and illustrates the determination of William II to set out the new church and its decoration as a veritable icon of Christianity that imposed a model to be respected and to be followed in a land that was still thoroughly islamicized.<sup>22</sup>

#### ARCHITECTURE

From the huge complex constituted by the 12th century monastery, only the cathedral, the cloister and some parts of the monastic buildings have

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<sup>21</sup> Edoardo D'Angelo has commented on the fact that the *Liber* of the Pseudo-Falcand, a major source for the history of Sicily in the second half of the 12th century, comes to a sudden halt at a phrase describing the influence exerted by Walter upon the young king as "too great" and "suspect:" *Itaque summa regni potestas et negotiorum cognitio penes Gualterium archiepiscopum Panormitanum erat, qui sibi regem eatenus suspecta satis familiaritate devinxerat ut non tam curiam quam regem ipsum regere videretur*. See *La Historia o Liber de regno Siciliae e la Epistola ad Petrum Panormitanae ecclesiae thesaurarium di Ugo Falcando*, ed. Giovan Battista Siragusa, *Fonti per la Storia d'Italia dell'Istituto storico italiano* 22 (Rome, 1897), p. 165. D'Angelo analyses the expression *suspecta familiaritas* and formulates the following hypothesis: "it is plain that the expression carries some sort of thinly veiled allusion or secret meaning: it seems to me plausible to argue that the author (Falcand) is here insinuating that a sexual (homosexual) relationship existed between the senior prelate and the young sovereign," D'Angelo, "*Suspecta Familiaritas*" (see above n. 1), pp. 86–87. Cantarella had already proposed this interpretation though without furnishing any evidence for it: see Glauco Maria Cantarella, "La fondazione della storia nel Regno normanno di Sicilia," in *L'Europa dei secoli XI e XII fra novità e tradizione: sviluppi di una cultura (Atti della decima settimana internazionale di studio, Mendola, 25–29 agosto 1986)*, *Miscellanea del Centro di studi medioevali* 12 (Milan, 1989), p. 187.

<sup>22</sup> Henri Bercher, Annie Courteaux and Jean Mouton, "Une abbaye latine dans la société musulmane: Monreale au XII<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Annales: économies, sociétés, civilisations* 34 (1979), 525–547.

more or less retained their original aspect. In front of the cathedral there stood a portico and a vast open atrium, of which nothing today remains (see Fig. 13.1).<sup>23</sup> Facing east, the church is flanked by cloister to the south. On the three other sides stood the monastic outbuildings: to the east the chapter house, to the south, the dormitories and, to the west, the refectory and the hospital in a building which today has been entirely rebuilt. On the north side of the cathedral was to be found the royal palace, accessible directly by way of the adjacent gates located within the northern apsidiole.

The cathedral is the most imposing edifice so far as size is concerned; indeed, at the transept it is one hundred metres long and forty-three metres wide, and attains a maximum height of forty-three metres. The exterior aspect of the church represents a mixture of French and Islamic traditions. The west facade recalls the Norman cathedrals, which feature a main body flanked by two towers,<sup>24</sup> while the chevet is decorated by a series of interlaced arches, adorned with geometrical motifs evoking Islamic Art and exploiting the contrast between the orange limestone and the brown lava.<sup>25</sup> Where Roger II's Palatine Chapel follows a plan combining the Greek and the Latin cross, Monreale features a Latin ground-plan modelled upon that of Cefalù. It revives the typology of the churches of southern Italy, which themselves drew their inspiration from a "Benedictine-Cluniac" model. The Cluniac schema would seem to have been introduced into the Church of the Holy Trinity at Mileto in the time of Robert Guiscard, by the agency of Robert de Grandmesnil, former abbot of Saint-Evroult d'Ouche,<sup>26</sup> and was then diffused across the rest

<sup>23</sup> "The surviving written words are as follows: *Assumptio Sanctae Mariae, Nativitas Iesu Christi, Praesentatio Christi in templo*," Lello, p. 23.

<sup>24</sup> The left tower was destroyed in the 19th century. Here is how Lello judges it to have looked originally: "the other [tower] on the left hand side [...] rose to a great height and with three orders of windows, which in the middle had columns of marble and granite, and at the top, aside from the great pyramid in the middle, it had four other small ones in the corners," Lello, p. 24.

<sup>25</sup> Wolfgang Krönig, *Il Duomo di Monreale e l'architettura normanna in Sicilia* (Palermo, 1965); Giovannella Cassata, Gabriella Costantino and Rodolfo Santoro, *Sicile romane*, Zodiaque, La Nuit des Temps, 65 (Saint-Léger-Vauban, 1986), p. 167ff; Gianluigi Ciotta, *La cultura architettonica normanna in Sicilia* (Messina, 1992).

<sup>26</sup> Mario D'Onofrio, "Le panorama de l'architecture religieuse," in Mario D'Onofrio, ed., *Les Normands, peuple d'Europe, 1030-1200*, exhibition catalogue, (Paris, 1994), pp. 185-93, here p. 189ff. On the arrival of the monks of Saint-Evroult, see Marjorie Chibnall, "Les moines et les patrons de St-Evroult dans l'Italie du Sud au XI<sup>e</sup> siècle," in Pierre Bouet, ed., *Les Normands en Méditerranée dans le sillage des Tancrede (Actes du Colloque de Cerisy-la-Salle, 24 au 27 septembre 1992)* (Caen, 1992), pp. 161-78.



of Calabria, as the churches of S. Giovanni Vecchio, in Stilo, and Santa Maria della Roccelletta, in Squillace, and the cathedrals of Messina, Cefalù and Monreale, in Sicily, all testify. The ground-plans of the churches of the Trinity, of the Roccelletta and of Cefalù do in fact follow one and the same pattern, namely, a central nave that is wider than the side aisles are, a projecting transept and a deep choir which ends in the east in three apses. Monreale revives this typology, but its novelty lies in its having a transept that barely projects out at all, and the arms of which extend eastwards into the lateral apses. The main nave is three times as wide as the side aisles. The naves are separated by nine columns on either side, on which rest pointed arches. A triumphal arch separates the western part from the central square. According to Gravina, up until the 17th century a chancel separated the naves from the choir.<sup>27</sup> The delimitation is very pronounced and deliberate, and is reinforced by a flight of steps rising above the choir.

#### SCULPTURE: THE CLOISTER AND THE BRONZE GATES

##### *The Cloister*

On the southern flank of the cathedral there is a vast cloister in the form of a square (47 × 47 metres). Each gallery is defined by twenty-six pointed arches supported by twinned columns.<sup>28</sup> The corners are embellished with four columns, which brings the number of small columns resting on a stylobate to 228. The archivolts of the arches feature a play of polychrome dressing recalling the chevet of the cathedral. In the south-west corner a small aedicule encloses at its centre a fountain (see Fig. 13.2). From the bottom of the great basin there rises up a carved shaft which supports a calyx whose sepals are decorated with figures playing musical instruments and dancing. The originality of this cloister is achieved through the decoration of the supports: each shaft is distinct, sometimes smooth, sometimes carved, sometimes encrusted with polychrome mosaics with geometric patterns. The abacuses feature an essentially ornamental

<sup>27</sup> Gravina, p. 65.

<sup>28</sup> In order to envisage the capitals in their entirety, consult the vast online project *CENOBIUM—Ein Projekt zur multimedialen Darstellung romanischer Kreuzgangkapitelle im Mittelmeerraum*; see also *The Cloister of Monreale*, An Online Exhibition by the Photo library of the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz—Max-Planck-Institut, 22 June–18 October 2009.

decoration whereas the capitals develop a varied iconographic repertory: foliage, birds, fantastical animals, scenes featuring hunting and the grape harvest, fighters or warriors,<sup>29</sup> human heads, allegories but also Old and New Testament scenes. Of the entire set of carved capitals, fifteen feature narratives, illustrating Biblical episodes: the stories of Adam and Eve, Noah, Jacob, Joseph, Samson and Daniel for the Old Testament, and the Childhood of Christ, the Parable of Lazarus, the Mission of the Apostles and the Life of John the Baptist for the New Testament. Certain capitals present unique, highly symbolic themes, such as the True Cross upheld by Constantine and Helen, represented on the same capital as the Triumph of the Church over the Synagogue.

Scholarly studies devoted to the capitals in the cloister are essentially concerned with stylistic analysis and seek to distinguish different "hands" in such a way as to determine the origin of the artisans. Thus, Roberto Salvini, the author of the only monograph devoted to the cloister of Monreale, distinguishes five masters, aided by an unspecified number of assistants.<sup>30</sup> He gives each of them a name dictated by the main theme which they have carved: The Master of the Mission of the Apostles, the Master of the Dedication, the Master of the Putti, the Master of the Eagles, and the "Marmoraro." These stylistic differences suggest the involvement of several workshops, but the origin of the sculptors remains controversial, and various different regions have been advanced in the historiography, including Campania, Emilia-Romagna, Provence, Burgundy and the Ile-de-France.<sup>31</sup> Gandolfo has formulated the hypothesis of two successive workshops, whereby the first would be local and derived from the cloister work site of Cefalù and the second would be of Salernitan origin and would have worked on the small ambo of the cathedral in Salerno.

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<sup>29</sup> David Nicolle, "The Monreale capitals and the military equipment of Later Norman Sicily," *Gladius* 15 (1980), 87–103, reprinted in *Warriors and Their Weapons Around the Time of the Crusades: Relationships Between Byzantium, the West, and the Islamic World*, Variorum Collected Studies Series 756 (Aldershot, 2002).

<sup>30</sup> Roberto Salvini, *Il chiostro di Monreale e la scultura romanica in Sicilia* (Palermo, 1962). I should also mention an unpublished doctoral thesis, defended in 2002 at Münster: Birgitt Schermer, *Der Kreuzgang des Domes in Monreale. Eine Untersuchung zur Genese der romanischen Skulptur Siziliens*, under the supervision of Prof. D. Thränhardt (Münster, 2002).

<sup>31</sup> The Campanian formation of the sculptors is upheld by Biagi, Glass and Sheppard. This latter also discerns stylistic elements originating in Chartres. Cochetti Pratesi opts rather for the "Piacentine-Emilian" milieu, as well as Burgundy, whereas Krönig argues for the presence of artisans of Provençal origin, and of some sculptors who came from the cloister work-site at Cefalù. For the bibliography, see Nicoletta Bernacchio, "Monreale—scultura," *Enciclopedia dell'arte medievale* 8 (1997), pp. 527–28.

According to this same author, the first of the two teams was succeeded by the second around 1180, and the work site as a whole came to a halt towards 1185.<sup>32</sup> The only inscription providing us with any information about the personality of one of the artisans is preserved on a capital in the northern gallery (N19, according to Salvini): EGO ROMANUS FILIUS COSTANTINUS MARMURARIUS. Some authors reproach this particular sculptor for his lack of inspiration and imagination, and for the vanity that had prompted him to engrave his name on a capital that is in truth none too successful.<sup>33</sup> The inscription has been the subject of heated debate. Some see in “Romanus” a reference to the place of origin of the sculptor, namely, the city of Rome, while others think it is more likely to be the name of the dealer in marble.<sup>34</sup> Recently the attempt has been made to revive this second interpretation, and Romanus has been identified as a member of a family of Arabo-Christian dealers in marble who had worked in several sites across the capital, under the Norman sovereigns.<sup>35</sup>

Aside from the stylistic diversities, the specialists have run up against the lack of coherence or of logic in the organization of the iconographic themes. The “lack of a consistent program”<sup>36</sup> has been criticized, and the absence of any narrative and logical link between the capitals denounced. However, Gandolfo proposes to read these sculptures not as episodes in sacred history but as *exempla*.<sup>37</sup> Beat Brenk, in a more recent study, extends this interpretation and defends the hypothesis of a “Rhetorik der *varietas*,” narration certainly not being the first and only aim in a cycle of such scope.<sup>38</sup> Each capital has a different form and features a unique decoration, with a strongly theological tenor in the case of certain of them.

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<sup>32</sup> Francesco Gandolfo, “Vitalità e tipologie nelle sculture del chiostro benedettino,” in Giovan Battista Badagliacca, ed., *L'anno di Guglielmo 1189–1189, percorsi tra arte e cultura* (Palermo, 1989), pp. 141–173; Id., “Il chiostro di Monreale,” in *I Normanni—Popolo d'Europa 1030–1200*, exhibition catalogue (Venise, 1994), pp. 237–246.

<sup>33</sup> Salvini, *Il chiostro di Monreale; Sicile romane* (see above n. 25), p. 167ff.

<sup>34</sup> Giuseppe Mandalà and Marcello Moscone, “Tra Latini, Greci e ‘Arabici’: ricerche su scrittura e cultura a Palermo fra XII e XIII secolo,” *Segno e testo. International Journal of Manuscripts and Text Transmission* 7 (2009), 143–238, here 211ff.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Carl D. Sheppard, “Iconography of the Cloister of Monreale,” *The Art Bulletin* 31 (1949), 159–169, here 169.

<sup>37</sup> Gandolfo, “Vitalità e tipologie,” p. 171 (see above n. 32).

<sup>38</sup> Beat Brenk, “Zur Programmatik der Kapitelle im Kreuzgang von Monreale. Rhetorik der *varietas* als herrscherliches Anspruchsdenken,” in Klaus Bergdolt and Giorgio Bonasanti, eds., *Opere e giorni, studi su mille anni di arte europea dedicati a Max Seidel* (Venise, 2001), pp. 43–50, here p. 49.

It would have been simpler to choose the same typology: this *varietas* was therefore certainly intentional and explicitly commissioned. In Brenk's view, it would seem to have reflected the ambition to combine a plurality of techniques, repertoires, iconographic themes and stylistic approaches, so as to create a new artistic language, which recurs in the mosaic decoration. Brenk's theory is appealing, and it does not in fact seem very likely that the arrangement of iconographic themes, their richness and their variety should be the product of chance or the simple consequence of a juxtaposition of the work produced by several different workshops.

All the indications are that William II was the main sponsor, as the capital of dedication (W8, according to Salvini) testifies, recalling, as do the votive panels in mosaic form, that he was having a temple built which he was dedicating and offering to the Virgin Mary. The inscription on the abacus indicates as much: RE(X) QUI CVN(C)TA REGIS SICVLI DATA SVSCIPE REGIS ("King, who reigns over all, accept the gifts of the king of Sicily"). The king is represented giving the model of his church to the Virgin, and is in a dynamic pose. The maquette is borne by an angel, and it reproduces fairly faithfully the features of the cathedral, with the towers at the front, the long nave, the upper choir and the chevet with three apses. However, the cloister being intended above all for the monastic community, it is tempting to suppose that the monks who had come from the Cava dei Tirreni Abbey played a prominent role in devising a programme for the sculpted decoration, which would lend weight to the thesis that the sculptors were originally from Campania. For a commission of this nature, one would logically think of an important ecclesiastical dignitary, learned and close to the king. There thus emerges the possibility that the abbot-bishop of Monreale, Theobald, the king's privileged interlocutor, may have played precisely such a role, and been the sponsor-designer in his new monastery.<sup>39</sup>

### *The Bronze Doors*

The cathedral boasts two bronze doors, one of which closes off the side portal on the northern flank of the cathedral, the other the main portal, on the western wall. Both doors are signed, the first being the work

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<sup>39</sup> We can also envisage Theobald having had a hand in planning the mosaic decoration, and, more precisely, in the choice of monastic and eremitic effigies, see Brodbeck, pp. 198–99.

of Barisano of Trani (see Fig. 13.3), the second that of Bonnano of Pisa.<sup>40</sup> This latter door is of the utmost importance, because it preserves the only dated inscription in the whole cathedral: 1186. Measuring 7.80 metres by 2.80 metres, the door is divided up into forty distinct scenes, framed in the upper and lower parts of wider panels. A decorative motif in the form of garlands, composed of acanthus leaves with buds, runs vertically and along the sides of the doors, while rosettes surround each of the scenes. The programme begins on the lower tier, above pairs of lions and gryphons realised at a later date.<sup>41</sup> It reads from left to right and from bottom to top, the first twenty panels being devoted to the Old Testament cycle (from the Creation of Adam to Jacob), the last twenty to the Christological cycle (from the Annunciation to the Ascension). The whole ensemble is dominated by the triumphal figures of the Christ and of the Virgin Mary in majesty amongst the angels. The programme is arranged in terms of the typological symbolism of the concordance of the Old and the New Testament, which is realised, as William Melczer has emphasised, through the three moments of sacred history: *ante legem*, *sub lege* and *sub gratia*.<sup>42</sup> The prophets, located on the middle tier of the door, are the quintessential embodiment of this concordance and unite the cycles of Genesis and of the life of Christ. The form and arrangement of the panels, surrounded by eight nails and bosses, falls within the tradition of Byzantine or Italo-Byzantine doors.<sup>43</sup> On the other hand, the modelling in energetic relief, the sculpting of certain figures in the round where they stand out from the background, the lively and dynamic compositions, along with the theme of the *Concordia veteris et novi testamenti*, may be linked rather to Nordic examples, such as the door of St. Zeno in Verona or even that of St. Michael in Hildesheim.<sup>44</sup> The door at Monreale has often been compared

<sup>40</sup> The work is signed: BONANNO CIVIS PISANUS, see Albert Boeckler, *Die Bronzetüren des Bonanus von Pisa und des Barisanus von Trani* (Berlin, 1953); Melczer, *La porta di Bonanno a Monreale* (see above n. 15); Ottavio Banti, ed., *La porta di Bonanno nel Duomo di Pisa e le porte bronzee medioevali europee: arte e tecnologia (Atti del Convegno internazionale di studi, Pisa 6–8 maggio 1993)* (Pontedera, 1999).

<sup>41</sup> Around 1690, under Archbishop Giovanni da Roana, according to Melczer, *La porta di Bonanno a Monreale*, p. 52 and n. 20.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 255.

<sup>43</sup> On Byzantine bronze doors in Italy, one should consult the bibliographical synthesis of Antonio Iacobini, "Le porte bronzee bizantine in Italia: arte e tecnologia nel Mediterraneo medievale," in Antonio Iacobini, ed., *Le porte del Paradiso. Arte e tecnologia bizantina tra Italia e Mediterraneo, XI–XII secolo (Convegno internazionale di studi, Istituto Svizzero di Roma, 6–7 dicembre 2006)* (Rome, 2009), pp. 15–54, here n. 1 pp. 23–24.

<sup>44</sup> Melczer, *La porta di Bonanno a Monreale*, p. 256.

to that of St. Ranieri in Pisa, which is by the same artist. The resemblance is indeed striking, notably as regards the overall composition and the iconography of the scenes from the New Testament. However, not only is the door at Monreale much larger but it also presents the Old Testament cycle, and here Bonnano had made a genuinely original contribution to William II's foundation.<sup>45</sup>

The side door is signed Barisano of Trani, who represents himself on one of the panels, prostrate at the feet of an enthroned Saint Nicholas (see Fig. 13.3).<sup>46</sup> Consisting of twenty-eight panels, it measures 4.23 metres by 2.51 metres and is modelled on the doors at Trani and Ravello realised by the same artist.<sup>47</sup> In the upper part, the *Maiestas Domini* is repeated twice and surrounded by the Prophets Elijah and John the Baptist. The other panels represent the following themes: Deposition from the Cross, *Anastasis*, Virgin and Child, Saint Nicholas, the twelve apostles enthroned, two saints who are knights and two archers. The figures are handled in bas-relief, closely resembling the *méplat* technique. The vegetal decoration, which is rich and highly varied, is ubiquitous, surrounding each of the scenes and imparting a rhythm to the divisions of the doors. The composition is static and the figures hieratic. The two christological scenes and the saints who are knights follow Byzantine canons. The artist's place of origin, Apulia, may explain this tendency towards the Byzantine in the general composition and in the rendering, as much iconographic as stylistic, of the figures. The artist anyway draws attention to his own region through the effigy of Saint Nicholas. The patron saint of Bari is situated on the same tier as the christological scenes and the Virgin and Child; he is, moreover, the only saint bishop to feature and the artist prostrates himself at his feet, following the Byzantine rite of proskinesis, as a sign of homage and of prayer.

The choice of two artists, with their different techniques and styles, to realise the bronze doors of the cathedral may be explained in terms of their actual functions: one door, that of Barisano of Trani, was in everyday use for the entrance of the congregation into the northern side nave, whereas the other, which was majestic and grandiose, was probably only

<sup>45</sup> Brenk has recently compared the two doors, see Beat Brenk, "Bronzi della Sicilia normanna: le porte del duomo di Monreale," in *Le porte del Paradiso*, pp. 471–89, here p. 473ff.

<sup>46</sup> The precise inscription reads: BARISANUS TRANENSIS ME FECIT.

<sup>47</sup> David A. Walsh, "The Bronze Doors of Barisanus of Trani," in Salvatorino Salomi, ed., *Le porte di bronzo dall'antichità al secolo XIII (Atti del convegno internazionale di studi, Trieste 13–18 aprile 1987)* (Rome, 1990), pp. 399–405.

opened on solemn occasions and official ceremonies. But this difference in treatment, as Brenk has stressed, may also reflect the aesthetic of *varietas* evident in the thinking behind the cloister.<sup>48</sup>

### THE MOSAICS

Mosaic may be regarded as the quintessential art and technique of the Norman sovereigns. It is synonymous with display, requires costly materials and a highly elaborate technique. Through the use of gilded tesserae, the churches of the Norman kings all take on the luminous and scintillating aspect characteristic of Byzantine creations. The brilliance of the mosaics, associated with the use of sumptuous materials, such as marble and porphyry, gives rise to a lavish splendour, whereby art assumes the status of an *instrumentum regni*, according to the Byzantine concept. The church of Monreale is the largest edifice decorated with mosaics in the medieval West, having 7600 square metres of tesserae (see Fig. 13.4). Yet the decoration is not mentioned in any of the surviving sources, save for the *Ryccardi de Sancto Germano Chronica*, composed at Cassino at the beginning of the 13th century, which begins with a panegyric to the late sovereign and his cathedral.<sup>49</sup> This vast mosaic decoration has been the object of numerous studies and has given rise to lively debates, concerning variously the Latin or Byzantine primacy of the decoration, the dating and execution of the mosaics, the royal character of the programme and, more recently, the spatial aspects of the decoration viewed in its relation to the surviving or reconstituted liturgical furniture.

The iconographic programme divides up in a logical manner within the architectural space. Each cycle unfolds within its own precisely delimited framework. The lack of a cupola led to the adaptation of the traditional Byzantine programme to the architecture of the basilica, as could already be seen in the case of the cathedral at Cefalù. Thus, for want of a place at the top of the cupola, the Pantocrator is here in the apse conch (see Fig. 13.4). The celestial hierarchy, composed of seraphim, cherubim and archangels, who traditionally surround the Christ All Powerful in the dome, is here relegated to the vault preceding the apse. The prophets, represented in the drum both in the Martorana and in the Cappella

<sup>48</sup> Brenk, "Bronzi della Sicilia normanna," p. 472.

<sup>49</sup> Richard of San Germano, *Ryccardi de Sancto Germano notarii Chronica*, p. 4 (see above n. 18); see also Kitzinger, p. 17.

Palatina, are relegated to the upper tier of the side walls leading to the apsidioles.<sup>50</sup> The Theotokos, described here as “Panachrantos,”<sup>51</sup> and traditionally represented in the apse conch, assumes its place at Monreale beneath the Pantocrator, ringed by the solemn guard of the archangels, Michael and Gabriel, and by all the apostles. Finally, on the lower tier, the choir of saints appear on either side of the central window. In the south and north apsidioles respectively, the cycles of Peter and Paul are represented, inspiration being taken directly here from the Cappella Palatina. However, there are a greater number of scenes here, and notably the two monumental panels of the Crucifixion of Peter and the Beheading of Paul. The central zone is reserved for the christological cycle, which is very extended and indeed unique in Sicilian decorative programmes. There are many more episodes than in the Cappella Palatina, and the cycle of the Passion is entirely new. The christological panels unfold, on the one hand, in the central square with the scenes of the Childhood of Christ and, on the other, in the arms of the transept with public life to the north and the Passion to the south. Finally, the Genesis cycle—from the Creation to Jacob wrestling with the angel—is represented in the nave, adopting the model of the Cappella Palatina and falling more broadly within a long tradition established since the first Roman basilicas. It is divided into two tiers and is read in a concentric fashion around the nave. On the west counter-façade, apart from the scenes from Genesis, there are three panels recounting episodes from the lives of the saints.<sup>52</sup> Finally, in the side aisles, there feature the cures and miracles of Christ. There is no precedent for this cycle in the Cappella Palatina, and it unfolds over twenty-two panels on the north and south walls of the side-aisles.<sup>53</sup>

Traditional historiography presents the decoration of Monreale as a juxtaposition of a “Byzantine solea” and a “Latin nave.”<sup>54</sup> However, the distinction is not so easily made, for actually within the so-called

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<sup>50</sup> For the Martorana, see Ernst Kitzinger, *The Mosaics of St. Mary's of the Admiral in Palermo*, *Dumbarton Oaks studies* 27 (Washington, 1990); for the Palatine Chapel, see *Cappella Palatina*.

<sup>51</sup> “Pure, immaculate,” cf. Demus, p. 114 et n. 174.

<sup>52</sup> The saints represented were Castrensis, Cassius and Castus, see Brodbeck, pp. 365–83.

<sup>53</sup> Silvia Pasi, “Alcune scene di guarigione del ciclo cristologico del duomo di Monreale. Caratteri e problematiche,” *Corsi di Cultura sull'Arte Ravennate e Bizantina* 40 (1993), 361–377.

<sup>54</sup> The titles of the different parts of the study by Demus are highly instructive, since they serve to divide the building up in terms of “the tradition of centralised decoration” and “the tradition of longitudinal decoration.” Kitzinger describes the choir as “essentially



“Byzantine” programme are to be found images deriving from a Latin tradition. In the transept there unfolds the christological cycle, which reverts to the traditional Byzantine liturgical festivals, or the *Dodekaorton*. However, the cycle has been extended, and certain scenes would seem to be inspired by Anglo-Norman culture, as in the case of the development of the Pilgrims of Emmaeus over four panels, for which there is no parallel in the Byzantine iconography. Kitzinger compares these images to one of the masterpieces of English miniature painting from the first half of the 12th century, the Saint Albans Psalter, and refers to the drama *Peregrinus*, one of the sacred theatrical representations of Biblical subjects in vogue in this period.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, certain images from the Passion of Christ allow us to glimpse Latin insertions into so-called traditional Byzantine canons. Thus one might note the detail of the bearer of the pitcher in the Washing of the Feet, the presence of the lamb on a cup on the table at the Last Supper, the gesture of Christ blessing Peter after he has cut off the ear of Malchus in the Betrayal of Judas, etc.<sup>56</sup> These elements, which also feature in the iconography of southern Italy, testify to the local reformulation of Byzantine canons.<sup>57</sup> The hagiographic programme, comprising one hundred and seventy-four saints, attests to this same wish to merge Byzantine, Western and local components, as much in the choice of saints as in the iconography of some of them.<sup>58</sup> There too, the Byzantine canons regarding effigies are sometimes revised, allowing us to glimpse quintessentially Latin attributes: abbatial cross, Episcopal cross or tau. The hypothesis has therefore been advanced that there were local artists on the site at Monreale, since nothing comparable exists in Byzantium itself,<sup>59</sup> notwithstanding the theses of Demus and Kitzinger, who presumed that Greek mosaicists were involved, as if there had been a

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Byzantine” and points to Roman influence upon the general organization of the Genesis cycle.

<sup>55</sup> The theatrical dramas, together with the iconography that stems from them, first saw the light of day in northern France and in England, and were certainly known in Sicily at the end of the 12th century, see Emile Mâle, *L'art religieux du XII<sup>e</sup> siècle en France* (Paris, 1924), pp. 137–38; see also Otto Paecht, Reginald Dodwell, Francis Wormald, *The Saint Albans Psalter*, Studies of the Warburg Institute 25 (London, 1960), pls. 39–40.

<sup>56</sup> Brodbeck, pp. 60–62.

<sup>57</sup> I would cite here the door at Benevento, the Breviary of Oderisius, the later frescoes in San Pellegrino di Bominaco, etc.

<sup>58</sup> See Brodbeck.

<sup>59</sup> “The mosaics may not be that Greek, however. Nothing comparable is known in contemporary Byzantium, and the mosaicists might have been Greek-trained, whether in Sicily or on the South Italian mainland”, Borsook, p. 53 (see above n. 15).

high degree of continuity with work sites from the previous period. There is in fact "intrinsic evidence" in the case of the decorative schemes realised under Roger II confirming that they are attributable to a "Greek hand."<sup>60</sup> The question is more complex in the case of the decoration at Monreale, for the iconographic programme reflects an actual interpenetration of elements. Intense scrutiny of the models borrowed, along with a detailed and systematic analysis of the techniques used in the mosaics would certainly lead to the formulation of new hypotheses regarding the problem of the Monreale artists' origins, which is still very far from being resolved.<sup>61</sup>

Historians of art have long wrangled over whether the whole of the decoration belonged to the epoch of William II or if it extended beyond this period. The hypothesis of a later dating was first advanced by Victor Lazarev, who attributed the mosaics in the transept, the main nave and the side naves to the period of Frederick II.<sup>62</sup> An analogous thesis has been defended by Sergio Bettini, Roberto Salvini and Stefano Bottari, and it was reinforced by the supposition that Venetian mosaicists had come to complete the decoration at the beginning of the 13th century.<sup>63</sup> Otto Demus and Ernst Kitzinger, for their part, maintained that the whole of the decoration was realised during the reign of William II.<sup>64</sup> Dating aside, the conflicting interpretations also concerned stylistic analysis, with Demus, and then Kitzinger, accepting unreservedly the Byzantine origins of the style, while Bettini, Salvini and Bottari disputed this assumption. The stylistic link between the mosaics of Monreale and the Byzantine late-Comnenian decorations has, however, now been demonstrated<sup>65</sup> and

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<sup>60</sup> Ernst Kitzinger, "Two mosaic ateliers in Palerme in the 1140s," in Xavier Barral I Altet, ed., *Artistes, artisans et production artistique au Moyen Age* (Paris, 1986), 1, pp. 277–294.

<sup>61</sup> Brodbeck, p. 199ff. The author addresses the question of the origin of the artists, a topic that with the multiplication of studies on Monreale would seem to have become somewhat ossified, and wonders whether it might not be more pertinent to investigate the provenance of the models utilized. The technique involved in mosaics has been the object of recent research, see n. 68.

<sup>62</sup> Victor Lazarev, "The mosaics of Cefalù", *The Art Bulletin* 17 (1935), p. 222; the same hypothesis as regards the dating was advanced by this author in the Russian edition of his *Storia della pittura bizantina* (1947–1948; Turin, 1967).

<sup>63</sup> Sergio Bettini, *La pittura bizantina. II. I mosaici* (Florence, 1939), p. 60; Stefano Bottari, *Mosaici bizantini della Sicilia* (Milan, 1963), p. 33.

<sup>64</sup> With, however, some divergences between the two authors, see Demus, p. 148 and Kitzinger, p. 17.

<sup>65</sup> Lydie Hadermann-Misguich, "Tendances expressives et recherches ornementales dans la peinture de la seconde moitié du XII<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Byzantion* 35 (1965), 429–448; Ead., "Innovations de l'art des Comnène dans les mosaïques byzantines de Sicile", *Corsi di Cultura sull'Arte Ravennate e Bizantina* 27 (1980), 59–69.

today critics concede that the mosaics were executed when William II was alive. No precise date can be attached to the execution of the decoration, but the votive panels representing the king crowned by Christ, on the one hand, and the sovereign giving a model of the church to the Virgin, on the other, give us leave to suppose that the mosaics were realised during William II's lifetime. The only dated inscription in the cathedral is to be found, as we have already mentioned, on the bronze doors, disclosing the year 1186 and implying that the decoration was already well advanced, or even already finished, by that date. Recently, study of the hagiographic programme—long neglected by specialists—has enabled us to render the datings more precise: the importance of the decade of the 1170s for the eastern part of the church, the final date of 1183 for the north arm of the transept or again a prolongation into the 1180s for the decoration of the side aisles of the nave.<sup>66</sup> As for the stylistic homogeneity propounded by earlier scholars and upheld by Kitzinger, in particular, it can be thrown into doubt once again by observation of the techniques used in the mosaics themselves. This author asserted that it was impossible to distinguish between the different teams of mosaicists who had worked on the decoration, so homogeneous was the style.<sup>67</sup> Now simply by undertaking a detailed analysis of the effigies of saints, which taken as a whole form a unique and coherent programme, we are able to identify the work of at least three different workshops, from the most experienced in the central apse to a less skilled workforce tackling the medallions of saints in the intrados of the arches in the nave.<sup>68</sup> This diversity, at once technical and stylistic, does not seem to reflect a chronological development, such as exists in the Cappella Palatina, where two styles may clearly be distinguished, one characteristic of Roger II's campaign in the sanctuary, the other of that realised by William I in the naves. At Monreale, this diversity testifies rather to the presence of several teams working simultaneously, or very nearly so, within one and the same space.

Following on from the debates over style—and therefore over dating—interest turned more specifically to the royal dimension of the foundation and of its decoration. In 1990 Eve Borsook specified in her preface

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<sup>66</sup> Brodbeck, pp. 191–195.

<sup>67</sup> Kitzinger, p. 75.

<sup>68</sup> Analysis of the size, the placing, and the thickness of the tesserae in fact enables us to differentiate between several different “hands” or teams of mosaicists. This question has been addressed by Sulamith Brodbeck at the *XXIIe Congrès international des études byzantines*: “Le chantier de Monreale,” round table on *La mosaïque byzantine et sa diffusion (XI<sup>e</sup>–XII<sup>e</sup> siècles): travail, technique et matériaux, restauration* directed by Antonio Iacobini.

that because “these studies [by Otto Demus, Ernst Kitzinger, Wolfgang Krönig...] concentrated upon a few specific aspects—such as style, iconography, date, and condition—any message shared by all three of these royal mosaics—at Cefalù, the Cappella Palatina, and Monreale—has escaped notice.”<sup>69</sup> The author dwells upon the allegorical character of the mosaics in the Cappella Palatina, Cefalù and Monreale in the course of her examination of the arrangement of the decoration and of the importance of the inscriptions which form an integral part of the panels. At Monreale, she demonstrates that images and inscriptions are so arranged that they legitimize and enhance the royal authority of William II, and ventures the hypothesis that the interior of the cathedral is a materialization of the heavenly city of Jerusalem, linked to the Marian image, a personification of the *Ecclēsia*. This last interpretation may be open to doubt, but it is nevertheless the case that the sovereign manifested a quite particular devotion to Mary and placed himself directly under her protection.<sup>70</sup> Indeed, at the very entrance to the building, on the west counter-facade, the Virgin of the Hodigitria type is invoked in order to grant direct protection to the king, through the inscription accompanying her: SPONSA SVE PROLIS O STELLA PVERPERA SOLIS / PRO CUNCTIS ORA SED PLVS PRO REGE LABORA.<sup>71</sup> In the choir, opposite the royal throne, the dedicatory panel for its part presents an atypical iconography: the Virgin is represented in profile—and not facing us or in a hieratic guise—reaching out her arms to receive the model of the church the king gives to her, on bended knee and in an attitude of devotion. The postures in profile, the bowed heads, and the dynamic movement of William II all serve to reinforce this privileged, indeed intimate, face-to-face encounter between the sovereign and the Virgin.

Aside from the intercession and protection that certain images embody, the programme reveals a veritable political theology which derives from the place occupied by the sovereign in this royal foundation. The presence of a lay figure, such as the king, tends to express a political claim in a religious framework. William II, seated on his throne, is located beneath the votive panel representing his coronation by Christ (see Fig. 13.5), but also beneath the genealogy of the Lord, as is attested by the series

<sup>69</sup> Borsook, p. vii.

<sup>70</sup> The church is dedicated to the Virgin and a Marian cycle was preserved in the atrium, see above n. 23.

<sup>71</sup> “The bride of her offspring. Star, bringer forth of the sun, pray for all, but [even] more work for king,” cf. Borsook, p. 57.

of Patriarchs represented in medallions in the intrados and at the top of the arch.<sup>72</sup> Thomas Dittelbach has explored this political theology, a veritable royal Christology, emphasising the crucial importance of the theme *Rex Imago Christi—Christus Imago Rex*.<sup>73</sup> More particularly, Dittelbach emphasizes the link between the written image and the portrait, the *Rex imperator in regno suo*, or again between the private and the public king. Furthermore, the hagiographic programme is particularly conducive to a political interpretation of the decoration. More than any other image in the building, the saints were expressly chosen by the sovereign in his role as sponsor, and by the same token they reflected his dynastic affiliations. We thus discern William II's fascination with Byzantium, and his concern to rival the *basileus*, through the employment of effigies of military saints and eastern anargyri as privileged protectors of the new sovereign and of his family; his alliance with the Plantagenet kingdom,<sup>74</sup> perceptible in the presence, unparalleled elsewhere in Sicily, of Thomas Becket, Hilaire of Poitiers or Radegonde, located in key positions within the decoration; and his rootedness in the local traditions of southern Italy, attested by the importance given to regional saints.<sup>75</sup> We thus have to do here with a set of thoughts which underline the sort of representation of itself that political authority was endeavouring to promote within a kingdom whose sole claim to coherence derived from the king who ruled it.

#### THE LITURGICAL AND CEREMONIAL FURNITURE, A SPATIAL REALITY

Images cannot properly be disassociated from the liturgical and ceremonial furniture. Yet scholars have paid very little attention to this latter, as Vladimir Zorić has observed in a recent article.<sup>76</sup> The rediscovery of a

<sup>72</sup> Abraham who engendered Isaac, who engendered Jacob, who engendered Juda, resuming the beginning of the descent of Jesus in the Gospel of Saint Matthew (Mt 1, 2). Melchisedec, Enoch and Noah cited in the larger genealogy given in the Gospel of Saint Luke (Lk 3, 23–28).

<sup>73</sup> Thomas Dittelbach, *Rex Imago Christi. Der Dom von Monreale, Bildsprachen und Zeremoniell in Mosaikkunst und Architektur, Spätantike—frühes Christentum—Byzanz 12* (Wiesbaden, 2003).

<sup>74</sup> Through his marriage in 1177 with the youngest daughter of Henry II, Plantagenet, Joan of England.

<sup>75</sup> I shall not rehearse my own interpretation in any detail, but simply refer the reader to Brodbeck, p. 85ff (Le programme hagiographique de Monreale, reflet de la politique extérieure de Guillaume II), p. 145ff (Monreale, symbole du pouvoir local).

<sup>76</sup> Vladimir Zorić, "L'arredo liturgico fisso nelle chiese di età normanna: un aspetto trascurato della storiografia architettonica," in Mario Re et Cristina Rognoni, eds., *Byzantino-Sicula V Giorgio di Antiochia. L'arte della politica in Sicilia nel XII secolo tra Bisanzio e*

plan of Monreale, dating from 1590 and preserved in the Vatican Secret Archive,<sup>77</sup> enables us to reconstitute the original layout of the furniture, notably the upper chancel, which was a veritable “Norman *macchina*.”<sup>78</sup> The naves designed to welcome the congregation were in fact separated from the sacred part of the church by an upper chancel: “At the top of the nave and the aisles is the atrium of the Choir, which is how we call that part to which we ascend by three marble steps and which we enter by three doors, one from the nave and one from each of the aisles.”<sup>79</sup> Three openings had thus been pierced: a central one, which corresponds to the choir, and two lateral ones, which grant access to the arms of the transept. According to Gravina, who has referred to the inventory of liturgical furniture for 1656, the chancel attained the height of a half-column, that is to say, around five metres fifty. Furthermore, the 16th century plan indicates the presence of the main altar, of a double ambo, of the monks’ stalls, of a cathedra in the apse, of a seat or throne facing that of the king, probably intended for the abbot-bishop,<sup>80</sup> and of tombs in the arms of the transept.

Now, a combined reading of the furniture—both liturgical and ceremonial—and of the iconographic programme testifies to the intense thought that had gone into the spatial organization of the cathedral, the different internal spaces and their function. Thus the programme reflects the funerary purpose of the arms of the transept—which housed the tombs of William I, Margaret of Navarre, her two sons, and would in future house the remains of William II—the monastic purpose of the choir, the “royal view” from the sovereign’s throne and the “episcopal view” from the abbot-archbishop’s seat.<sup>81</sup> The height of the chancel had not been left to chance, since it allowed a visual gradation running from west to east: the lower tiers of the apse disappeared from view as the congregation moved through the nave, so as to leave visible, at the foot of the chancel, nothing else but the figure of Christ Pantocrator.<sup>82</sup> This separation served

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*l'Islam (Atti del Convegno Internazionale, Palermo, 19–20 aprile 2007)*, Istituto siciliano di studi bizantini e neoellenici Bruno Lavagnini, Quaderni 17 (Palermo, 2009), pp. 87–126.

<sup>77</sup> Giuseppe Schirò, “Il rilievo dell’Abbazia del 1590,” in *Il Duomo di Monreale. Architettura di luce e icona*, Arte e Teologia 7 (Palermo, 2004), pp. 235–243.

<sup>78</sup> Vladimir Zorić, “L’arredo liturgico fisso,” p. 116.

<sup>79</sup> Gravina, p. 65.

<sup>80</sup> Brodbeck, p. 183ff.

<sup>81</sup> Dittelbach, *Rex Imago Christi*, p. 293: “single figures or scenes from the pictorial programme did not only have a mnemonic function in the liturgy, but also stood as ‘Exempla’ in royal ceremonies;” Brodbeck, p. 222, appendix 5.

<sup>82</sup> Brodbeck, pp. 187–188.

to delimit the space reserved for the monastic community and for the king, and thus established a private and a public view of the decoration. Each set of images was meant to be seen by a specific category of persons, reflecting their location and circulation within ecclesial space. The monks would pass beneath arches endowed with monastic and eremitic effigies as they made their way to the choir. This latter was the site of the mystery of the Incarnation, as evinced by the presence of scenes from the Childhood of Christ, among them in particular the unfolding of the Nativity across the whole width of the west diaphragm wall of the central square, visible to the monks but not to the congregation. The king on his throne sat beneath the genealogy of the Lord, opposite the public life of Christ and in the axis of a series of hagiographic effigies, vested with a pronounced political connotation.<sup>83</sup> The Mandyllion, or the Holy Face of Edessa, concealed, indeed, hidden at a height of over forty metres, was for its part visible only from the apse. It was therefore meant only for the officiating abbot-bishop and referred directly to the reality of the Incarnation and to the Eucharistic mystery. On the basis of these few examples, it would seem to be the case that the architecture, the furniture and the images had been conceived as a whole. They shed light one upon the other and are intrinsically interconnected, enabling us to assess the spatial reality of the building, the hierarchies, the distinctions and the polarities of the sacred site.<sup>84</sup>

#### MONREALE AFTER THE DEATH OF WILLIAM II

The premature death of William II in 1189, without a direct or designated heir, marked the end of a historical and political era. After the short-lived reigns of Tancred of Lecce and William III, Henry VI of Swabia, married to the youngest daughter of Roger II, Constance de Hauteville, acceded to the head of the kingdom in 1194. The Swabian dynasty replaced the Norman dynasty. Attention turned from the cathedral of Monreale to that of Palermo, which was rebuilt on the initiative of archbishop Walter. The political disorder into which Sicily was cast during the second half of the 13th century, and throughout the 14th century, also eclipsed the archbishopric of Monreale, which only retained its privileged function in

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 176–177 and appendix 5.

<sup>84</sup> We refer here to Baschet's study of "L'image en son lieu," see Jérôme Baschet, *L'iconographie médiévale* (Paris, 2008), p. 93ff.

relation to the noblest families of Italy and Spain. The cathedral suffered from neglect and its fabric began to deteriorate.

The first documents concerning the state of conservation of the monument date back to the last decades of the 14th century. Two of Gregory XVI's bulls, of 1371 and 1376 respectively, inform us of the degraded condition of the cathedral and of the monastery. In the first, the pope deplored the sorry state of the monastic complex. In the absence of monks, and having fallen into the hand of usurpers, the abbey "was wasting away of old age and threatened to end up in ruins." The pope then asked the bishop of Catania to repopulate Monreale with monks from other monasteries on the island.<sup>85</sup> In the second bull, he added that various accidental disasters had affected the monastery buildings.<sup>86</sup> In 1383, the bull of Pope Urban VI assigned a part of the property of the Archiepiscopal Mensa to the cathedral chapter, with a view to augmenting the number of monks, as well as *pro reparatione et conservazione ejusdem Ecclesiae*, and here he had in mind the repair of the church itself, the dormitory and the infirmary, but also the purchase of books and liturgical objects required for worship.<sup>87</sup> At the beginning of the 15th century, the Aragonese king Martin V granted a sum for restoration, in response to a request from the archbishop of Monreale, Fra' Paolo (1397–1418).<sup>88</sup> This gesture was repeated under his successor, Archbishop Giovanni II Ventimiglia. However, while documents are not lacking, it is hard to know what parts of the monastery were subject to restoration: works in the cloister—as Lello attests—the ceiling of the nave or the roof of the church.<sup>89</sup> Certain alterations are documented, such as the opening, in 1492, in the south apsidiole of an antisacristy and the blocking off in the north apsidiole of the access leading to the former palace of William II.<sup>90</sup> Between the 15th and the 16th century, a concern to restore Siculo-Norman mosaics became commonplace and extended to the decoration of Palermo, Cefalù and Monreale. So far as the latter was concerned, it was from 1518 that

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<sup>85</sup> Aurelio Antonio Belfiore, "Fasi significative nella storia architettonica del Duomo di Monreale," in *Il Duomo di Monreale. Architettura di luce e icona*, p. 49, according to the *Tabularium* di S. Maria Nuova, Biblioteca Centrale della Regione Siciliana, Fondo Monreale.

<sup>86</sup> Kitzinger p. 119; Maria Andaloro, "I restauri antichi dal XV al XIX secolo," in Maria Andaloro and Girolamo Naselli Flores, eds., *I Mosaici di Monreale: restauri e scoperte (1965–1982)*, XIII *catalogo di opere d'arte restaurate* (Palermo, 1986), p. 73; Belfiore "Fasi significative", p. 49.

<sup>87</sup> Belfiore "Fasi significative," p. 50.

<sup>88</sup> Lello, pp. 64–69.

<sup>89</sup> Maria Andaloro, "I restauri antichi," p. 73.

<sup>90</sup> Belfiore "Fasi significative," p. 50, after Del Giudice II.



we know about, and have documentation for the restoration of mosaics, undertaken by the mosaicist Pietro Oddo, who embarked upon the first restoration projects.<sup>91</sup>

In parallel to such developments, the monumental complex of Monreale very early aroused historical interest, once the Benedictines had begun to take particular care to preserve the privileges of the king and the bulls of the popes relating to the monastery and its church. Archbishop Arnault of Rexac (1306–1324) collected together, and arranged for the transcription of, the most important documents in a volume subsequently entitled *Codex de Rexac*, of which only two copies exist: one preserved at Monreale, at the Biblioteca del Seminario Arcivescovile, the other is in the Vatican Library.<sup>92</sup> The cartulary of the monastery, along with numerous illuminated manuscripts, goes to make up what would subsequently be called the *Tabularium* of Santa Maria Nuova. Preserved by the Benedictines of the monastery up until 1866, it was then transferred to the National Library of Palermo and today the manuscripts are scattered across several libraries.<sup>93</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

Monreale is a veritable artistic phenomenon which ought to be regarded as the culmination and fulfilment of a creative process having its origins in the art of the period of Roger II. Through its foundation, William II had succeeded in combining church, monastery and royal palace, in outdoing his grandfather's project at Cefalù and in rivalling the art of the kingdom's capital. The political and religious complex of Monreale may fairly be compared, in Krönig's opinion, with that of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, founded by the Emperor Justinian in the 6th century: "Just as Hagia Sophia was the major church of the imperial state, Monreale was evidently intended to become the major church of the Norman state of Sicily, combining some very specific qualities and assuming some precisely determined functions: those of royal foundation, of dynastic burial site linked to a royal palace, and of a monastery that was at the same time the seat

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<sup>91</sup> Gaetano Millunzi, *Il mosaicista Mastro Pietro Oddo, ossia restauri e restauratori del Duomo di Monreale nel sec. XVI* (Palermo, 1891).

<sup>92</sup> Giuseppe Schirò, *Le biblioteche di Monreale* (Palermo, 1992), p. 29.

<sup>93</sup> Carlo Pastena, ed., *Catalogo dei manoscritti del "Fondo Monreale" della Biblioteca centrale della Regione siciliana, già Biblioteca nazionale* (Palermo, 1998).

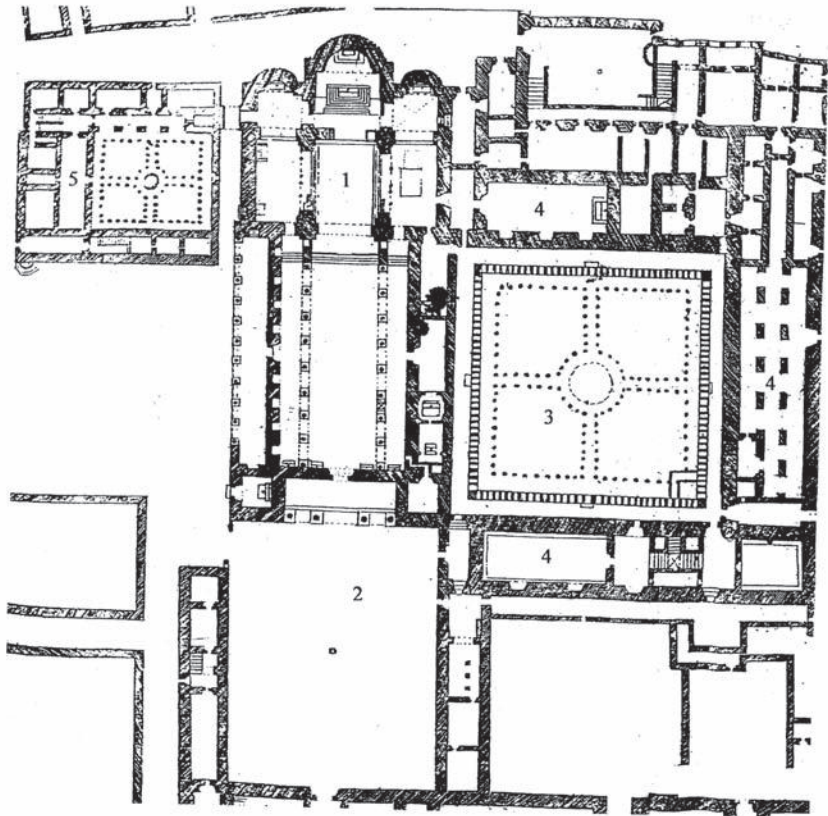
of a bishopric.”<sup>94</sup> Everything in the art of Monreale was designed to surpass what had been done before. The richness of the means employed to create this foundation was reflected in the sheer range of artistic expression on display. Brenk in fact draws a parallel between William II’s decision to summon artists from various different regions with that of Abbot Suger at Saint-Denis when he issued his call to artists of “divers nations.”<sup>95</sup> The *varietas* which characterizes both the sculptures in the cloister, the bronze doors and the mosaics, was an integral part of this foundation, as imposing as it was excessive, which tended to unify the different cultures and modes of expression in order to make manifest the mission and the role that the king intended to perform as much on the local scale as on the scale of Christendom. We are well able to understand the reaction of the historian of art Bernard Berenson when he travelled to Sicily in 1953 and visited the cathedral of Monreale. This great scholar of the Italian Renaissance was dismayed by this monument, which left him with a feeling of powerlessness. “The pleasure that I feel in this church,” Berenson wrote, “is all but ruined by the despairing conviction that I shall never succeed in appropriating either the edifice in its entirety or all its details.”<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Wolfgang Krönig, “La cathédrale ‘royale’ de Monreale,” in Henri Bresc and Geneviève Bresc-Bautier, eds., *Palerme 1070–1492. Mosaïque de peuples, nation rebelle: la naissance violente de l’identité sicilienne*, (Paris, 1993), pp. 81–88, here p. 86.

<sup>95</sup> Beat Brenk, “Bronzi della Sicilia normanna: le porte del duomo di Monreale,” in *Le porte del Paradiso*, p. 472. Regarding Abbot Suger’s appeal, see also Erwin Panofsky, *Abbot Suger on the Abbey Church of St.-Denis and its Art Treasures* (Princeton, 1979), pp. 72–75: *Magistrorum multorum de diversis nationibus*.

<sup>96</sup> Bernard Berenson, *Voyage en Sicile* (Paris, 1956), p. 77.



1. Cathedral
2. Atrium
3. Cloister
4. Monastic buildings
5. Royal palace

Fig. 13.1. Plan of the monastery of Monreale, 1166–1189 (after Del Giudice)

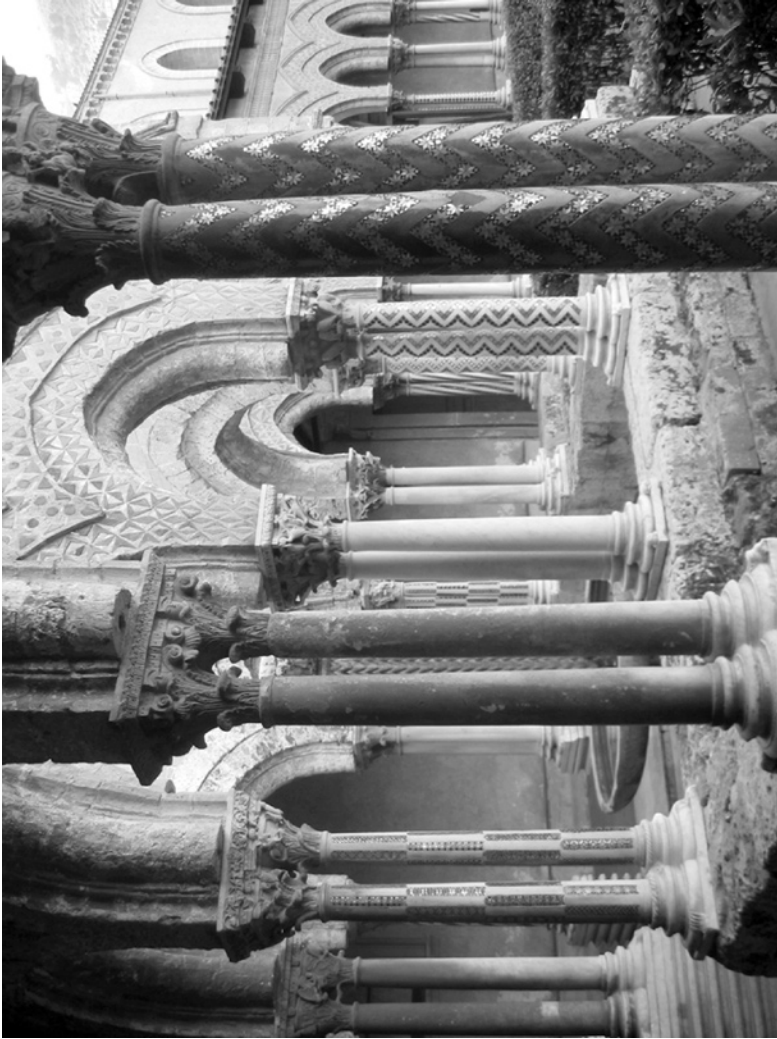


Fig. 13.2. The cloister of the monastery of Monreale, south-west corner, 1166–1189 (photograph by the author)



Fig. 13.3. Barisano of Trani's bronze door, the northern flank of the cathedral, Monreale, 1166–1189 (photograph by Beat Brenk)



Fig. 13.4. Mosaic decoration, looking eastwards from the nave, Monreale cathedral, 1166–1189 (photograph by the author)

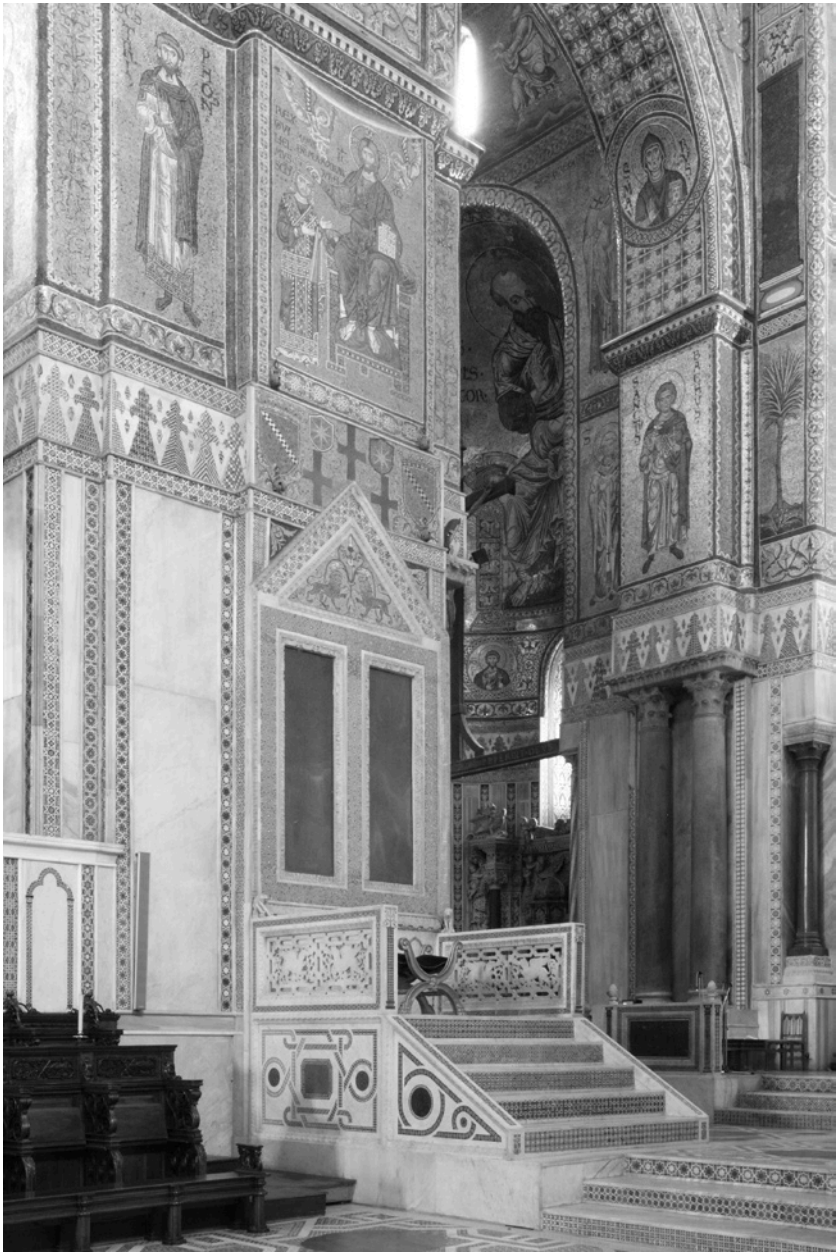


Fig. 13.5. View of the royal throne, and of the mosaic panel representing William II crowned by Christ, Monreale cathedral, 1166–1189 (photograph by the author)

LINGUISTIC CULTURES AND TEXTUAL PRODUCTION IN PALERMO,  
FROM THE END OF THE 11TH TO THE END OF THE 15TH CENTURY

Benoît Grévin

A PROFOUNDLY BURDENSOME MYTH

The history of Palermitan cultural production between the Norman conquest (1071) and the expulsion of the Jews from Sicily (1492) has still to be written. This fact may appear paradoxical but can be explained in terms of the persisting influence of a series of confusions which have thrown scholarly approaches to the question off balance.

The first misapprehension concerns the circumstances under which the royal Palermitan court existed, and its duration as a centre of attraction and textual production. While it is indeed undeniable that the Palermo of the Norman kings, from the coronation of Roger II to the death of William II (1130–1189) served as a major cultural centre where Latin, Arabic and Greek zones of textual production overlapped, thanks to the ideological programme adopted by the Norman state, this role in fact diminished from the end of the 12th century onwards, as a consequence of the disturbances accompanying the installation of the Hohenstaufen on the throne of Sicily and the minority of Frederick II (c. 1190–c. 1210). The consolidation of Swabian power, at the beginning of the 13th century, did not bring about a resurrection of the city's function as a curial pole of attraction. For the emperor had in fact deserted Palermo after his return from Germany in 1220, at first for long periods (he stayed there for only five months between 1220 and 1233), then entirely after 1233.<sup>1</sup> This abandonment would prove to be definitive. Forsaken by Conrad IV and Manfred (save for his coronation),<sup>2</sup> avoided by Charles I of Anjou,<sup>3</sup> the city only partly recovered its role as royal residence, when the Aragonese

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<sup>1</sup> Carlrichard Brühl, "L'itinerario italiano dell'imperatore: 1220–1250," in Pierre Toubert and Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, eds., *Federico II e le città italiane* (Palermo, 1994), pp. 34–47.

<sup>2</sup> *Die Chronik des Saba Malaspina*, ed. Walter Koller and August Nitschke (Hanover, 1999), 1, 8, pp. 117–18.

<sup>3</sup> He stayed there in the summer of 1270 while making preparations for the crusade of Tunis.



dynasty was installed on the island in 1282. In the course of his very long reign (1296–1337), Frederick III never lingered in Palermo, preferring Catania or Messina,<sup>4</sup> and his successors in the second half of the 14th century regularly found their access barred by unrest and the *de facto* domination of the city by the Chiaromonte.<sup>5</sup> The installation of Catalan power in 1397 did not fundamentally change the situation on the threshold of the 15th century since Blanche of Navarre swiftly established her court in Catania. It was in any case too quickly succeeded by the establishment of the Aragonese Vice-regency of the Trastámara, whose Palermitan agents were not able to stand in for a court and thereby modify an enduring state of affairs: between 1212<sup>6</sup> and 1500 there had ceased to be a sustained, let alone a continuous curial activity in the city.

These facts, familiar enough to every specialist, have failed to quash the myth of the “Palermitan court of Frederick II,” and of its putative prolongations or resurrections (under Frederick III, for example), thanks to a misunderstanding due not only to the carelessness of historians writing accounts based on purely second-hand knowledge, even if they must shoulder much of the blame. The confusion between the enduring influence of Sicilian culture *largo sensu* and Palermitan textual production may also be explained in terms of the city having continued across the centuries, in the eyes of the supporters of Swabian, and then Aragonese legitimacy, to sustain the symbolic function of capital of the kingdom (*sedes, caput regni*), in manifest contradiction with its real influence. Palermo may have been the urban centre with the largest population (though suffering terrible depopulation around 1220, and after the great plague of the mid-14th century) and the principal trading centre of the island, yet after 1212 it had lost most of the essential functions it had formerly possessed—a role then quite exceptional in the Christian west—throughout the 12th century, and in relation to the kingdom as a whole.

The corollary of this confusion between symbolic importance and real influence has been a recurrent inability on the part of historians to grasp the articulation between the Palermitan cultural milieu and the wider

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<sup>4</sup> Patrizia Sardina, *Palermo e i Chiaromonte splendore e tramonto di una signoria. Potere nobiliare, ceti dirigenti e società tra XIV e XV secolo*, Medioevo mediterraneo 1 (Caltanissetta-Rome, 2003), p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22ff.

<sup>6</sup> One can date this decline of the Palermitan court to as early as 1189, if one bears in mind that the circumstances accompanying the seizure of power by Tancred, and then by the emperor Henry VI, the regency of Constance and the minority of Frederick II were hardly conducive to the maintenance of a sophisticated curial culture.

environment, and this on different scales (the island context, the kingdom of Sicily *lato sensu*, the Italian peninsula, the Mediterranean basin) during the greater part of the late Middle Ages. It is simply anachronistic to suppose that, because Palermo was the official capital of Sicily between 1200 and 1500, it was therefore bound necessarily to be endowed with prestigious cultural functions epitomizing the various phases of Sicilian culture. Now this anachronism gives rise to a number of different misunderstandings. The Palermo of the 13th or 14th century may well have remained the first city of Sicily, and yet it no longer possessed the demographic weight or the institutional continuity which would have enabled it, with its sovereigns almost permanently absent, to establish itself as the principal matrix of the island's textual cultures. After 1200 the city barely fulfilled the role of major centre of cultural attraction in the western third of the island, where moreover it did not nullify the importance of sites of cultural production such as Trapani. From the 13th to the 15th century, Messina or Catania, often favoured by the court, indeed, other cities of lesser importance, fulfilled a comparable cultural function, and sometimes a greater one on the Sicilian scale, in accordance with the nomadism of the royal court, when such a thing existed, or with the prevailing balance of power on the island, when it was absent (for the greater part of the 15th century) or nullified by major political crises (the epoch of the Vicariates). The fact that the crystallization of a Sicilian linguistic identity occurred in Messina, a process perhaps already under way since the 13th century, and manifest in the 14th century,<sup>7</sup> the founding of the university in Catania in 1445, or again the professional emigration of humanists of Palermitan origin from the island in the course of the 15th century, ought therefore not to be regarded as historical aberrations, the consequence of a Machiavellianism on the part of the royal power or of a sort of curse that had deprived the city of an influence befitting its role as "capital." These supposed shortcomings were in fact due to existing power relations and dynamics on the island and in the wider Mediterranean. Hence the need for historians to rethink the city's cultural role after 1200, by placing its symbolic status in

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<sup>7</sup> Compare the part played by the Messinians in the creation of the Sicilian "volgare illustre" under Frederick II and Manfred, and the central role of the city in the development of the forms of literary Sicilian at the beginning of the 14th century (on the Messinian origin of the Sicilian vulgarizers of the *Historia di Eneas* and likewise of the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great, see Francesco Bruni, "La cultura e la prosa volgare nel '300 e nel '400," in *Storia della Sicilia* 4 (Palermo, 1980), pp. 179–217, in particular pp. 202–210. The notion that noble Sicilian followed the linguistic usage of Messina rather than that of Palermo would seem to be characteristic of the Sicily of the years between 1220 and 1350.

parentheses. Allowing for its particular characteristics and its limitations, Palermo was then but one of the protagonists in the domain of Sicilian textual production, whereas during the “Norman century,” after the transfer of the comital court from Messina to Palermo in 1112, she had become *the* centre in which the various linguistic resources of the kingdom were concentrated and gave rise to a series of textual productions unique at that time in the Mediterranean context.

Once due weight has been granted to this attempt at “demythologization,” it becomes possible to read, through their discontinuities, the long-term evolution of textual cultures of which only a partial reflection has been preserved, in the shape of the surviving documentation produced in the course of four centuries in the city and its immediate zone of influence (the Conca d’Oro, the great urban and peri-urban monasteries). Beyond the veritable breach occasioned by the transition between the Norman and the Swabian epochs and the resulting loss of Palermo’s curial function, the political upheavals and the demographic decline (the years between 1190 and 1220), we can discern the lineaments of a fluid textual culture, the reflection of a polyglossia which was transformed over time without ever being wholly nullified, but also of a dialectic whereby the city, formerly a pole of attraction on a Mediterranean scale, became a more modest centre redistributing regional competences in the direction of the mainland.

#### THE FUNCTIONS OF A CAPITAL, OR THE PALERMO OF THE NORMAN KINGS (1112–1194)

If the precise definition of the ideological programme of the Norman sovereigns is still a matter for debate,<sup>8</sup> the cultural history of Norman Palermo, a centre for textual production and for curial translation, has surely been accorded the most attention, despite lacunae due above all

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<sup>8</sup> See Jeremy Johns, *Arabic Administration in Norman Sicily. The Royal Dīwān* (Cambridge, 2002); Graham A. Loud and Alex Metcalfe, eds., *The Society of Norman Italy, The medieval Mediterranean 38* (Leiden-London-New York, 2002); Alex Metcalfe, *Muslims and Christians in Norman Sicily: Arabic speakers and the end of Islam* (London-New York, 2003); Karla Mallette, *The kingdom of Sicily 1100–1250: a literary history* (Philadelphia, 2005); Annliese Nef, *Conquérir et gouverner la Sicile islamique aux XI<sup>e</sup> et XII<sup>e</sup> siècles*, Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises d’Athènes et de Rome 346 (Rome, 2011); Giuseppe Mandalà and Marcello Moscone, “Tra latini, greci e arabici: ricerche su scrittura e cultura a Palermo fra XII e XIII secolo,” in *Segno e testo. International Journal on Manuscripts and Text Transmission* 7 (2009), 23–143.

to the unevenness of the documentation. Yet we are very far from having a clear vision of written production in the city and its environs during the period deemed to be the most brilliant in its long and varied history. The balance of the surviving testimonies is weighted heavily in favour of the court, whose textual productions, whether scientific (translations by Henry Aristippus<sup>9</sup> or by the emir Eugenius, the geography of al-Idrīsī . . .),<sup>10</sup> administrative (the activities of the trilingual chancellery)<sup>11</sup> or liturgical (epigraphy,<sup>12</sup> notably the monumental epigraphy of the cathedral, of the abbey of Monreale and of the other churches, and the fashioning of artefacts whose use and provenance are sometimes uncertain, such as the trilingual Arabo-Graeco-Latin psalters, at least one of which is very probably of Palermitan origin),<sup>13</sup> have enjoyed better rates of survival. It is also possible to gain some idea of the activities of writing, copying or reading then favoured by certain prominent religious institutions (the cathedral, the abbeys of Monreale and of Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio) whose libraries or archives have not wholly disappeared, or can be partly reconstructed by means of inventories.<sup>14</sup>

Faced with this prestigious but disparate mass of texts, deriving from a curial activity or linked to the court and created by a predominantly "international" personnel (or, more precisely, a siculo-international one, that is to say, recruited both in the island, in other parts of the kingdom, and at various points in the Mediterranean basin or in the Latin West), the textual productions of the city as such have been consigned to relative obscurity. The extant witnesses point to the almost exclusive predominance

<sup>9</sup> Annliese Nef, *Conquérir et gouverner*, pp. 223–24.

<sup>10</sup> A useful synthesis of the reigns of Roger II and William I may be found in Hubert Houben, *Roger II. von Sizilien. Herrscher zwischen Orient und Okzident* (Darmstadt, 1997), pp. 104–119.

<sup>11</sup> *Codex diplomaticus regni Siciliae*, I/2, 1: *Rogeri secundi regis diplomata latina*, ed. Carlrichard Brühl, (Köln, 1987) (for the reign of Roger II); Jeremy Johns, *Arabic administration* (production in Arabic for the entire period).

<sup>12</sup> See Janine Sourdel-Thomine, "Le style des inscriptions arabo-siciliennes à l'époque des rois normands," in *Études d'orientalisme dédiées à la mémoire de Lévi-Provençal* (Paris, 1962), 1, pp. 307–315; Annliese Nef, *Conquérir et gouverner*, in particular pp. 157–63.

<sup>13</sup> Ms. London, British Library, Harley 5786. For the debates regarding the origin of the Arab and Greek copyists of this manuscript, see Houben, *Roger II*, p. 181 and note 95, and Annliese Nef, *Conquérir et gouverner*, pp. 212–17, where the precarious nature of the hypotheses concerning their origin is emphasized.

<sup>14</sup> See Henri Bresc, *Livre et société en Sicile (1299–1499)*, Centro di studi filologici e linguistici siciliani. Supplementi al bollettino, 3 (Palermo, 1971), pp. 17–21. See in particular the Arabic inventory dating back to the 12th century held in the treasury of the Palatine Chapel, on which see Annliese Nef, *Conquérir et gouverner*, pp. 217–20.

of a Graeco-Arabic urban notarial culture up until the end of the 12th century.<sup>15</sup> Arabic was of course used by the Muslim population, but also by a sizeable Jewish minority, which had its own forms of writing (own Judaeo-Arabic dialect) and, perhaps already by this date, its own dialect. As for Greek, it was employed in court and city alike as the language of culture by a composite Christian milieu, no doubt effecting a synthesis between autochthonous (Sicilian) elements which were originally Greek-speaking and had been more (Western Sicily) or less (North-eastern Sicily) profoundly Arabized during the period of Muslim domination, a personnel coming from the perennially Greek-speaking mainland zones of the Kingdom of Sicily (Southern Calabria, and the region of Otranto),<sup>16</sup> and finally an Arabo-Christian immigration issuing from a wide range of different backgrounds, but within which there might be discerned a Syrian elite following the Melkite rite and already characterized in the East by a Graeco-Arabic cultural and liturgical bilingualism<sup>17</sup> (George of Antioch). The reconstruction of Palermitan 12th century linguistic identities on the basis of their textual reflections thus proves from the outset to be far more problematic than the cliché of the “Sicily of three languages and three religions” would imply.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, we cannot settle for a gradual transition from an Arabic to a Latin Palermo, any more than we can accept the idea of a superimposition of three originally distant cultures. By contrast with the court, in which the prominence of Romance speakers introduced from the start a dynamic of Latinization,<sup>19</sup> and by contrast also with the residual Muslim population using various registers of Arabic, a part of the culture of the urban elites—the sector which clustered around the Arabic-speaking Christian minority, embracing pre-Conquest Christians and emigrants—would seem to have practised a Graeco-Arabic

<sup>15</sup> Giuseppe Mandalà and Marcello Moscone, “Tra latini, greci e arabi.”

<sup>16</sup> Annick Peters-Custot, *Les grecs de l'Italie méridionale post-byzantine (IX<sup>e</sup>–XIV<sup>e</sup> s.)*. *Une acculturation en douceur*, Collection de l'École française de Rome, 420 (Rome, 2010).

<sup>17</sup> Henri Bresc, “Arabi per lingua, greci per rito, i Mozarabi di Sicilia con e dopo Giorgio,” in Mario Re and Cristina Rognoni, eds., *Byzantino-Sicula V. Giorgio di Antiochia. L'arte della politica in Sicilia nel XII secolo tra Bisanzio e l'Islam. Atti del Convegno Internazionale (Palermo, 19–20 Aprile 2007)*, Istituto siciliano di studi bizantini e neellenici 'Bruno Lavagnini,' Quaderni 17 (Palermo, 2009), pp. 263–82; Giuseppe Mandalà and Marcello Moscone, “Tra latini, greci e arabi.”

<sup>18</sup> A good synthesis addressing this problem at the level of the kingdom as a whole in the Norman and Swabian epoch may be found in Vera von Falkenhausen, “Una Babele di Lingue: a chi l'ultima parola? Plurilinguismo sacro e profano nel regno normanno-svevo,” *Archivio storico per la Calabria e la Lucania* 76 (2010), 13–35.

<sup>19</sup> Regarding productions in Latin and French at court see Annliese Nef, *Conquérir et gouverner*, pp. 192–98.

bilingualism, whose logic, in its diglossic aspects, no doubt dated back in part to the Muslim epoch. For these Arabized Palermitan Christians, Greek had taken on a formal function referring both to their religious affiliation and to their historical past.

The narratives of visitors, whether Muslim (Ibn Jubayr in 1184)<sup>20</sup> or Christian (Pierre de Blois in 1166–1168),<sup>21</sup> and those of Sicilian chroniclers (Hugo Falcandus), help us to trace the transformation of a linguistic and cultural balance which suffered distortion with the passage of time. We thus pass from the Palermo of the first decades of the conquest (1072–1112)—during which a minority of Romance-speaking conquerors was no doubt superimposed upon a largely Muslim and Arabic-speaking population and upon a Christian Arab minority following the Greek rite but whose mother tongue was Arabic (or who were in transition towards Arabic)—to the already thoroughly Latinized Palermo of the reigns of William II and Tancred (1166–1194), by way of a dynamic transition corresponding to the part of the reign of Roger II, Count and later King of Sicily, in which the court mainly resided in Palermo (1112–1154), and to that of his son William I (1154–1166). The relative intensity of textual production during the years 1140–1190 may no doubt be explained in part by the existence of a precarious balance: only then, through a deliberate policy of arranging for the immigration of Mediterranean elites who were thereby incorporated into the initial Sicilian nucleus, was an “Arabo-Christian” milieu constituted, knit together by the use of Arabic, but sufficiently competent in Greek, and later in Greek and in Latin, to fashion the most celebrated translations.<sup>22</sup> The most accomplished representative of this milieu was certainly the emir Eugenius (c. 1130–c. 1202), a member of a family of Graeco-Arabic culture from Troina, who entered the service of the Norman dynasty and was possessionated in the area of the church of San Salvatore, and translator from both Arabic (Ptolemy’s *Optics*) and Greek (Prophecy of the Sybil Erythrea) in Latin.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> See Jeremy Johns, *Arabic administration*, pp. 212–96.

<sup>21</sup> Egbert Türk, *Pierre de Blois. Ambitions et remords sous les Plantagenêts* (Turnhout, 2006), pp. 101–188.

<sup>22</sup> For more information on this milieu, see Annliese Nef, *Conquérir et gouverner*, pp. 225–29, who emphasizes how few known translators there were, and argues that, given the present state of scholarly knowledge of the primary sources, we are hardly justified in speaking of the Norman kings’ “translation programme.”

<sup>23</sup> Vera von Falkenhausen, “Eugenio da Palermo,” in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, 43, 1993, pp. 502–505; Annliese Nef, *Conquérir et gouverner*, p. 225.

Beyond the Graeco-Arabic diglossia which characterized a part of the population, the quadrigraphic inscription on the tombstone of Anna, mother of the priest Grisantus (1148), testifies to the fact that the exaltation of a ceremonial multilingualism was not then peculiar to the court but was also to be found reflected in urban usages, with striking variations, however.<sup>24</sup> The inscription was composed in Latin, Greek and Arabic, but also in Judaeo-Arabic, which points to the existence of autonomous urban logics, integrating into their symbolization at least one facet of the four great linguistic and textual cultures of the various quarters of Palermo, namely, Latin, the language of formal (and, in particular, written) communication of the Continental Romanic emigration, be it south or northern Italian, or else of Atlantic origin (the “Anglo-Norman” zone) employing for less solemn forms of communication its various Romance idioms; the classical (written, liturgical), middle (pragmatic and scientific writings) and dialectal Arabics of the Muslims and of the Arabic-speaking Christians; the Greek shared by the residual Greek speakers of the Italian South, and in the form of a liturgical and ceremonial language, by the Arabized Christians from the Palermitan region, and/or those coming from the more Eastern parts of Sicily, indeed from the Mediterranean basin; finally, the Judaeo-Arabic of the Jewish communities who also used Hebrew and Aramaic in their guise as sacred languages.

At the court, the linguistic balance and its symbolizations were different again.<sup>25</sup> Hebrew did not seem to be accorded any particular place, whereas among the Romanic idioms that might be used in Palermo (Italian dialects, either from the South or else from Lombardy, Provençal, the langue d’oïl), Norman French, still used in the latter half of the 12th century as the identitary language of the royal family and of the upper aristocracy (or of the upper clergy, of Northern origin),<sup>26</sup> was doubtless already the vector for the consumption of a courtly literature (romances, chansons de geste) which would not entirely disappear from the island until the 15th century.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Wolfgang Krönig, “Der viersprachige Grabstein von 1148 in Palermo,” *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 52 (1989), 550–558; Annliese Nef, *Conquérir et gouverner*, pp. 108–109.

<sup>25</sup> See Annliese Nef, *Conquérir et gouverner*, pp. 73–118: ‘La sphère de la souveraineté: les langues du roi.’

<sup>26</sup> Hugo Falcandus, *Liber de regno Sicilie*, cap. LXXIII (the year 1167): *Quibus ille [Henricus] Francorum se linguam ignorare, quae maxime necessaria esset in Curia, nec eius esse, respondebat, industriae ut oneri tanto sufficeret...*

<sup>27</sup> Henri Bresc, *Livre et société en Sicile*, introduction, pp. 102–104.

The symbiosis we discern between these urban and curial dynamics of mid-12th century Palermo derives certainly from the power of the sovereigns to bring the ethnic, linguistic and cultural “frontier” represented by this urban population—which mixed Arabic and Greek speakers from before and after the conquest with a Romanic-speaking immigration—into communication with the activities of writing and literary consumption centred on the palace and of interest to men of letters from England to Syria. The concentration in Palermo between 1130 and 1190 of men of letters from every background in fact obeys the logic of networks, which owes nothing to chance. The Latin cadres were natives of the mainland part of the Kingdom (with some shifts in the balance reflected in the composition of the Chancellery towards the end of the period)<sup>28</sup> but also and above all, they were, by virtue of the Norman networks, natives of the Plantagenet zone (Pierre de Blois, in the retinue of Étienne du Perche . . .). The Muslim elites brought together notables who had remained in the island after the conquest and a network of *Ṣiqilliyūn* scattered across the *dār al-Islām*, from Morocco to Egypt but still retaining some links with the island. We have already recalled the role of the Arabic-speaking Christian diasporas. Finally, a Greek orthodox network linked the court and the city to the Byzantine world, by way of the Greek-speaking zones of the Kingdom of Sicily. When the monarchy was at its height (1130–1170), the Court was therefore able to play with this set of interfaces in order to guarantee the continuity of a textual production greatly benefiting this configuration favourable to translation. This production was in its turn likely to be projected towards the Arabic, Greek or Latin worlds, thereby maintaining the city’s attractiveness. The diffusion of the homiletic production of Philagathos of Cerami in manuscript form may serve to illustrate this dynamic: born in a locality close to Enna, midway between Palermo and Messina, around 1080, educated in the Calabria of the Basilean monasteries, his fame as a preacher took him by way of a Sicilian circuit to Palermo, where he preached several times in the Cathedral and the Cappella Palatina. Furthermore, his homiliary, far from being restricted to a Sicilian context, was then diffused in large numbers across those parts of the Orient where there was Greek culture.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Benoît Grévin, *Rhétorique du pouvoir médiéval. Les Lettres de Pierre de la Vigne et la formation du langage politique européen (XIII<sup>e</sup>–XV<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises d’Athènes et de Rome, 334 (Rome, 2008), pp. 270–77.

<sup>29</sup> Luca Amelotti, “Filagato da Cerami,” in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, 47, 1997, pp. 564–65.



Yet there was no guarantee that this dynamic would prove to be perennial. The anecdotal character of certain Muslim encomiastic productions, written by men of letters who in fact spent most of their lives in the *dār al-Islām*,<sup>30</sup> or the revulsion felt by distinguished Latin intellectuals who found it hard to adapt to the Palermitan context, as did Pierre de Blois, rapidly returning home after a stay turned out badly,<sup>31</sup> shows how the cultural attractiveness of the Palermitan context had constantly to be cried up, given the political and geographical drawbacks. The latter meant that to a good many Latin or Muslim men of letters, used to more “orthodox” zones of production, Palermo was a disquieting purgatory.

Operating behind the court in its role as a cultural interface, Palermo in fact exhibited some functions fundamentally different from those of the major centres of textual production in the Latin world, excepting the “frontier” of Toledo and the Antiochian milieu.<sup>32</sup> Hence the importance of studying the activities and logics of textual production of the part of the urban population that was Arabo-Christian, or rather Christian with a Graeco-Arabic culture (or Latino-Arabic, if one takes into account a Christian, Arabic-speaking immigration originating in al-Andalus, such as the *Indulci*, or in north Africa).<sup>33</sup> It was doubtless this composite minority (sometimes called Mozarabic, in imitation of a terminology elaborated for Spain)<sup>34</sup> which, between 1120 and 1190, guaranteed the cohesion of the Palermitan literary milieu, at the cultural and linguistic intersection of the diverse components of the royal ideology.

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<sup>30</sup> Annliese Nef, “Un poème d’Ibn Qalāqis à la gloire de Guillaume II,” in Benoît Grévin, Annliese Nef and Emmanuelle Tixier, eds., *Chrétiens, juifs et musulmans dans la méditerranée médiévale. Études en hommage à Henri Bresc* (Paris, 2008), pp. 34–43, and more recently Annliese Nef, *Conquérir et gouverner*, pp. 204–206.

<sup>31</sup> See Egbert Türk, *Pierre de Blois*.

<sup>32</sup> It is in any case more to the point to compare Palermo with the Antiochian milieu than with the Castilian cultural “frontier” in the 12th century. It is in the Antiochian milieu that we find a superimposition, or rather an imbrication, of Arabic, Greek and Latin textual cultures, and this fact ought to have some bearing upon the importance of the “Antiochians” in the Palermitan cultural milieu of the 12th century.

<sup>33</sup> Giuseppe Mandalà and Marcello Moscone, “Tra latini, greci e arabi.”

<sup>34</sup> Henri Bresc, “Arabi per lingua, greci per rito.”

BETWEEN SWABIANS AND ANGEVINS: PROVINCIALIZATION, DECLINE AND RENEWAL (1190–1282)

It was not by chance that the first written signs of the growing Latinization of Palermo occurred during the minority of Frederick II. With the first urban notarial documents composed in Latin (but retaining Greek or Arabic subscripts),<sup>35</sup> at the very end of the 12th century, the indications of a shift, all the more significant for being accompanied by a major political and demographic crisis, began to multiply, though doubtless lagging a little behind the changes in the demographic balance and in spoken usage. The troubles which were then lacerating Sicily finally led in Palermo to the disappearance of the greater part of the Muslim population, and to an economic decline exacerbated after 1212 by the court's decision to desert the city. This desertion, just as much as the socio-political upheavals of the years 1190–1210, was doubtless a significant factor behind the decline in population, which seemed to reach a low water mark around 1220, before recovering in the latter part of the reign. The Latinization of the majority of the residual population was, however, neither complete nor straightforward.

On the one hand, an Arabo-Christian urban elite, which was highly Latinized, held its own in this new environment by clustering around certain families (such as the Fallamonaca) who took on political responsibilities in the service of the monarchy, though at the same time preserving their Arabophony, at any rate during the reign of Frederick II (though also losing, it seems, the use of Greek), indeed, beyond it.<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, the immigration of a large Jewish community from the Gharb (from Morocco and West Algeria), having settled in western Sicily, and in Palermo in particular, compensated in part for the absence of the Muslim population, thereby ensuring the survival of a Palermitan Arabophony throughout the late Middle Ages.<sup>37</sup> Associated with the immigration to Palermo and to the Palermitan hinterland (Corleone) of further Latin contingents, Lombard ones in particular, this series of shocks served to renew the linguistic and textual cultures of the city, though without

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<sup>35</sup> Giuseppe Mandalà and Marcello Moscone, "Tra latini, greci e arabi."

<sup>36</sup> Vera von Falkenhausen, "Una Babele," pp. 26–27.

<sup>37</sup> Giuseppe Mandalà, "La migration des juifs du Ġarb," in Benoît Grévin, ed., *Maghreb-Italie. Des passeurs médiévaux à l'orientalisme moderne*, Collection de l'École française de Rome, 439 (Rome, 2010), pp. 19–48.

causing them to lose a number of characteristic features. At the end of the 13th century Arabic was still spoken and written there, although it was the Judaeo-Arabic—or doubtless a number of different variants of it<sup>38</sup>—of a revitalized and culturally altered Jewish community, and not the Arabic (or variants of Arabic) of the Muslims who had gone or of the great Arabo-Christian families which had been Latinized between the death of Frederick II and that of Manfred (1250–1266). Romance was spoken and written there, in the classic form of a diglossia whereby Palermitan Sicilian, whose defining characteristics were doubtless constituted only at that date, was still reserved for speech, and played scarcely any role as a writing medium (the islanders who played some part in the forging of Frederick and Manfred’s “volgare illustre” were almost all eastern Sicilians, from Messina in particular),<sup>39</sup> whereas the Latin used in legal deeds lagged behind court usage, which had been reformed, in the shadow of the papal Curia, on the mainland (the school of the *ars dictaminis* which flourished in Campania).<sup>40</sup> The use of Greek, for its part, was fossilized, being reserved for unusual liturgical contexts, as is borne out by the origin of the Greek-speaking men of letters at the court of Frederick II. They came henceforth from the Salento,<sup>41</sup> whereas the court’s Latin stylists were recruited after 1220 in the Terra di Lavoro.<sup>42</sup>

The crucial fact requiring us to reinterpret the cultural activities of the period is in fact linked above all to the radical change in the dialectical relationship between Palermo and the rest of the Mediterranean world. Following a complex period of transition, after the first third of the 13th century the court had deserted the city once and for all. Palermo’s role as a centre attracting literary elites from various backgrounds in order

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<sup>38</sup> It is likely that the Judaeo-Arabic of the communities settled in Palermo since before 1071, structurally similar to the dialects of Ifrīqiyya, differed quite markedly from the one used by the migrants of 1239, which originated in more western parts of the Maghreb (Gharb).

<sup>39</sup> Giacomo da Lentini (province of Syracuse); Tomaso di Sasso di Messina (Messina); Guido delle Colonne (Messina); Stefano Protonotaro da Messina; Jacopo Mostacci (Messina?); Mazzeo di Ricco da Messina (Messina). Regarding the members of the Sicilian poetic school originating in Palermo or its hinterland, see *infra*, p. 426 and note 49.

<sup>40</sup> On this reform and its consequences see Benoît Grévin, *Rhétorique du pouvoir médiéval*.

<sup>41</sup> Michael B. Wellas, *Griechisches aus dem Umkreis Kaiser Friedrichs II.* (Munich, 1983).

<sup>42</sup> Fulvio Delle Donne, “La cultura e gli insegnamenti retorici nell’Alta Terra di Lavoro,” in Id., ed., *Suavis terra, inexpugnabile castrum. L’Alta Terra di Lavoro dal dominio svevo alla conquista angioina* (Arce, 2007), pp. 133–57.

to fashion a synthetic culture was now taken by Frederick II's itinerant *Magna curia*, which gravitated towards the North, moving gradually ever further away from Sicily (at first between Capua, Melfi and Foggia, and then, at the end of the reign, between Foggia and the north of Italy), becoming latinized in the process. Within the Frederician empire, Palermo certainly retained a residual role as a reservoir of diverse linguistic competences. The scholar and mathematician John of Palermo,<sup>43</sup> archbishop Berard (whose Arabophony, though plausible, poses problems, and who was very probably more often at the court than in Palermo),<sup>44</sup> and the *secretus* of western Sicily, Oberto Fallamonaca, were thus employed by the emperor to go on embassies to the Arab world, for example in Cairo in 1227 or in Tunis in 1240.<sup>45</sup> But such diplomatic missions were set in train by orders issued, as the extant register of the Sicilian chancellery of 1239–1240 testifies, in the nerve centre of the Kingdom, its itinerant court, though doubtless reaching the parties concerned in Palermo and steering them towards their Arabophone destinations.<sup>46</sup> This residual continuity therefore did not have much to do with the activities of production of a royal court, which had moved elsewhere, at the same time renewing a large part of its personnel. Indeed, it was not a "Palermitan court" that had followed Frederick II on to the mainland after 1212, but a composite body in which the Sicilians, and the Palermitans in particular, played a more and more reduced part as time went on.<sup>47</sup> It is still difficult to gauge the importance, perhaps by no means negligible, of the strictly Palermitan element within the Arabophone component of Swabian power, shared

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<sup>43</sup> On John of Palermo, his links with Leonardo Fibonacci, his translations, and the identification of him with the *magister Johannes de Panormo notarius et fidelis noster* mentioned in the register of 1240, see Wolfgang Stürner, *Friedrich II. Der Kaiser (1220–1250)* (Darmstadt, 2000), pp. 387–88 and note 81, with the earlier bibliography.

<sup>44</sup> Giuseppe Mandalà, "Un ambasciatore di Federico II in visita alle piramidi: Berardo arvescovo di Palermo (a. 1227)," *Aevum* 85/2 (2011), 1–22.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, together with Gian Luca Borghese and Benoît Grévin, "Aspects linguistiques de la diplomatie sicilienne au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle," in Stéphane Péquignot and Silvio De Franceschi, eds., *Les langues de la négociation*, forthcoming in 2013. On the use of scientific exchanges in the diplomacy of Frederick II see Giuseppe Mandalà, "Il prologo delle risposte alle questioni siciliane di Ibn Sab'în come fonte storica. Politica mediterranea e cultura arabo-islamica nell'età di Federico II," *Schede medievali* 45 (2007), 25–94.

<sup>46</sup> *Il registro della cancelleria di Federico II del 1239–1240*, ed. Cristina Carbonetti-Venditelli, Istituto storico italiano per il medioevo fonti per la storia dell'Italia medievale, Antiquitates, 19/1–2 (Rome, 2002), 2, pp. 512–15. Comment on this text may be found in Gian Luca Borghese and Benoît Grévin, "Aspects linguistiques."

<sup>47</sup> Hans Martin Schaller, "Die Kanzlei Kaiser Friedrichs II. Ihr Personal und ihr Sprachstil," *Archiv für Diplomatik* 3 (1957), 207–86.

between a minority of curial personnel and the cadres from the garrison city of Lucera.<sup>48</sup>

Our necessary scaling-down of the Palermitans' role in court culture in the epoch of Frederick II and Manfred leads us to draw some drastic conclusions regarding the part played by the city in developing certain textual practices generally taken to be emblematic of Sicilian influence in the 13th century. It is thus possible to reduce the significance of a Palermitan substrate as much in the development of the Sicilian (in fact Campanian) Latin culture of the 13th century, as in that of the Sicilian "volgare illustre." This supraregional synthesis was developed under the aegis of the court during a part of the "Swabian age" (1230–1266) in which the sovereigns spent most of their time between Campania, the north of Puglia, Tuscany and Lombardy, with the assistance of protagonists who were native to Tuscany, Campania or Puglia as much as to Sicily. Western Sicilians scarcely featured in this history intimately linked to the role of inter-regional melting pot assumed by the Frederician *Magna Curia*: the big battalions were supplied by Eastern Sicily (Messina...) and the mainland.<sup>49</sup> Likewise, the greater part of the activities of Latin textual production or of translation from Arabic and from Greek into Latin attested at the court of Frederick II cannot, save for rare exceptions,<sup>50</sup> be attributed to a Palermitan personnel. The Latin notariat, of Sicilian origin, still by no means a negligible part of the royal chancellery during the emperor's minority,<sup>51</sup> was marginalized by Capuans, and other Campanians, after 1220, and the activity of those translators who adorned the court—Michael Scot or

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<sup>48</sup> Annliese Nef, "La déportation des musulmans siciliens par Frédéric II: précédents, modalités, signification et portée de la mesure," in Claudia Moatti, Wolfgang Kaiser and Christophe Pébarthe, eds., *Le monde de l'itinérance en Méditerranée de l'antiquité à l'époque moderne* (Pessac, 2009), pp. 455–78; Alex Metcalfe, *The Muslims*, pp. 285–90.

<sup>49</sup> The historiography has only gradually disentangled itself from the equation "Sicilian school" = Sicilian culture. See, for example how the debate has evolved, from the traditional presentation of Margherita Beretta Spampinato, "La scuola poetica siciliana," in *Storia della Sicilia* 4 (Palermo, 1980), pp. 387–425 to that of Furio Brugnolo, "La scuola poetica siciliana," in Enrico Malato, ed., *Storia della letteratura italiana. 1. Dalle origini a Dante* (Rome, 1995), pp. 265–338. While it is necessary to take into account the uncertainty of the information we have respecting the actual authors of the poems, one might reckon that of the twenty-five extant names of producers from the Sicilian school under Frederick II and Manfred, only Ruggero da Palermo had a Palermitan origin, and, among the poets considered to be important by the tradition itself or because of textual witnesses, Cielo d'Alcamo was probably originally from western Sicily (Furio Brugnolo, "La scuola poetica siciliana," p. 268).

<sup>50</sup> Like John of Palermo, on whom see *supra* note 43.

<sup>51</sup> Benoît Grévin, *Rhétorique du pouvoir médiéval*, pp. 270–74.

Theodore of Antioch, for example—had very little or even nothing to do with the city. The Antiochian or Anglo-Norman emigration which helped to enrich the Palermitan “international” culture of the 12th century continued under Frederick II. It was perhaps still determined by the logics of the familial networks originally linked to Palermo, especially in the case of Antioch, but from now on the mainland was in the ascendant. In part the nostalgic preserver of traditions dating back to the Norman epoch whose continuity was increasingly threatened and then sundered between the death of Frederick II and the Vespers, in part a new city whose population, after the disasters of the years 1190–1210, had been reconstituted on Romance- and Arabic-speaking foundations different from those of the 12th century, the Palermo governed by the lieutenants of Charles I of Anjou between 1266 and 1282, and then, after 1282, by the Aragonese sovereigns, would no longer have much in common, so far as both textual production and cultural influence were concerned, with the dazzling capital of the Norman Kings.

#### THE NEW CULTURES OF ARAGONESE PALERMO (1282–1397)

The textual production of Aragonese Palermo should be viewed in the same light as that of the epoch of Frederick II, that is to say, no heed should be taken of the recurrent clichés to be found in the secondary literature. It is impossible to base a case upon the most prestigious aspects of the textual production associated with Frederick III, whether it concerns the theological effervescence of the radical Mendicants (Arnold of Villanova) or of a Ramon Lull,<sup>52</sup> or the production at his court of a lyric poetry and of Occitan poetic arts,<sup>53</sup> when seeking to characterize the different facets of Palermitan culture at the beginning of the 14th century. The expectation was that one would use Catalan (and the Occitan traditionally associated with it as a poetic idiom in the 13th–14th century in the Catalan-speaking zone) in Palermo from 1282 onwards, an innovation linked to the fostering of ties with the crown of Aragon.<sup>54</sup> The career of Jofre de Foixà, who composed *Regles de trobar* for King James, and was abbot of San Giovanni

<sup>52</sup> Francesco Bruni, “La cultura e la prosa volgare,” pp. 187–212, in particular pp. 190–202. Ramon Lull, in 1313–1314, thus stayed only in Messina.

<sup>53</sup> On Occitan lyric poetry at the court of Frederick III, see *ibid.*, pp. 187–90.

<sup>54</sup> They doubtless in any case had some antecedents, linked to Frederick II's first marriage and to the dynastic ties with the Aragonese dynasty under the Swabians.

degli Eremiti in 1293, provides ample confirmation of this point. But the royal itinerary around the island's cities make it impossible to characterize Palermo as the centre in which this "Catalano-Sicilian" court culture was elaborated. If one bears in mind that the beginning of the 14th century also saw the development of a courtly Sicilian (independent of the Frederician "volgare illustre") having its point of departure in the linguistic usage of Messina,<sup>55</sup> that the activity of producing Arabic texts was restricted, in Palermo as in the rest of the island, to the Jewish community, where it has however long been undervalued,<sup>56</sup> and finally that Sicily was then still deprived of a university, in an epoch when they were proliferating on the mainland, Palermo seemed to be losing for good the function essential to a major centre of cultural production. The gradual achievement of mastery, in the shadow of Messina, of the vulgar tongue in the field of economic and administrative texts, was first of all attained by the nobility, followed by the city authorities and then by the monarchy. Administrative Sicilian thus took hold in Palermo in the second half of the century, yet without ever truly nullifying the pre-eminence of Latin.<sup>57</sup> But its ascendancy, commonplace when viewed in the context of the Mediterranean as a whole, does not go far towards tempering the impression one has that the city's Latin cultures had fallen asleep, immersed in a provincial drowsiness which the production of the ecclesiastical milieu, at bottom quite banal (Senisio),<sup>58</sup> barely disturbed. Admittedly, Palermo was not wholly cut off from the major centres of renewal of the Italian textual and literary cultures. The growing importance in the city of the Pisan colony, in particular, facilitated the creation of pragmatic writings, associated with mercantile and notarial practices, and calqued upon Tuscan models. But this opening up can hardly be said to have led to a renewal of literary production. In the case of the Christian majority of the population, one would be hard pressed to find a glimmer of cultural originality, to judge by the inventories of books proliferating at that date.<sup>59</sup>

It is other elements which allow us to follow the development of specific practices reinventing in their own fashion a highly ideologized urban

<sup>55</sup> Francesco Bruni, "La cultura e la prosa volgare," pp. 207–208.

<sup>56</sup> See Giuseppe Mandalà, "Un codice arabo in caratteri ebraici dalla Trapani degli Abate (Vat. Ebr. 358)," *Sefarad*, 71/1 (2011), 7–24.

<sup>57</sup> Henri Bresc, "La pratique linguistique des municipalités. Sicile et Provence, 1300–1400," *MEFRM* 117 (2005/2), pp. 645–57.

<sup>58</sup> As regards the production at Senisio, around the monastery of San Martino delle Scale, see Francesco Bruni, "La cultura e la prosa volgare," pp. 213–38.

<sup>59</sup> Henri Bresc, *Livre et société*.

culture, centred upon a defence of insular Sicilianism and involving the exaltation of the Norman-Swabian origins of the Aragonese dynasty. Aragonese Palermo in fact imparted new life to the Latin cultural codes invented earlier on the mainland by the jurist-notaries at the court of Frederick II, in order to bend them to a somewhat paradoxical identitary logic. This memorialistic, political and urban culture exalting a Ghibelline kingship in fact found expression in Palermo, in the shadow not so much of an evanescent Kingship, as in that of the urban striving for autonomy of the *universitas* and of the growing feudal power of the Chiaromonte. The protagonists of this culture were notaries and jurists from Palermitan families, who shared out their competences in the service of the city, the crown and the feudal powers, such as the Carastono.<sup>60</sup> The textual codes of this memorialistic and political culture were those of the *ars dictaminis*, a middle Latin rhetorical culture all but absent from Norman Sicily,<sup>61</sup> adopted by those stylists at the court of Frederick II who had been influenced by papal models since the beginning of the 13th century, and whose legacy had been synthesized on the mainland, in the last third of the 13th century, in textual surveys assembling hundreds of political texts (*summe dictaminis*).<sup>62</sup> The fact of their being reutilized in the Sicily of the 14th century is indicative of the ideological importance of some of them. This insular reutilization in fact obeyed a logic that differed in part from that prevailing in the rest of Europe.

Anthologies of *dictamina*, evoking the glorious days of the Swabian dynasty, and in particular the controversial succession of Manfred and

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<sup>60</sup> See the precise evocation of this milieu of notaries-jurists, sometimes going back to the Arabic-speaking elite of the Norman epoch, and of its diplomatic, juridical, notarial and literary activities under Frederick III and Peter II in Pietro Colletta, *Storia, cultura e propaganda nel regno di Sicilia nella prima metà del XIV secolo: la Cronica Sicilie* (Rome, 2010), p. 32ff.

<sup>61</sup> This *dictamen* culture, which circulated among ecclesiastics formed by the culture of the Loire region visiting Sicily such as Pierre de Blois, although it apparently did not find a noteworthy outlet in a court and city whose chancellery and notariat were still not very Latinized, came into its own during the minority of Frederick II, as is attested by the exchanges between Palermo, Campania and the papal Curia contained in the ms. Paris, BnF 11867, recently published as *Die kampanische Briefsammlung*, ed. Susanne Tusczeck, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Briefe des späteren Mittelalters, 2, (Hanover, 2010). But the handful of aulic productions in this language addressed to the young Frederick II shortly after his marriage (1210–1211) came too late to be inserted into a strictly Palermitan tradition, since 1212 saw the start of the abandonment of Palermo by the sovereign, and the beginning of his German adventure.

<sup>62</sup> Benoît Grévin, *Rhétorique du pouvoir médiéval*; Fulvio Delle Donne, “La cultura e gli insegnamenti retorici.”



Corradin after the death of Frederick II—crucial points in the elaboration of an anti-Angevin ideology—were subject to a work of reelaboration in 14th century Palermo. The mode of construction, and the content, of the chronicle of the anonymous Palermitan (*Cronica Sicilie*, composed at intervals between 1337 and 1348),<sup>63</sup> itself clearly Palermitan in orientation, depended in part on the exploitation of documents selected at the beginning of the 14th century from collections adopting a pro-Swabian line, and followed a precise ideological programme.<sup>64</sup> The manuscript Palermo, Biblioteca della Società Siciliana per la Storia Patria I. B. 25 (codice Fitalia), likewise preserves a series of still in part unpublished political and literary *dictamina*, the political purpose of which is much debated.<sup>65</sup> This corpus of rare texts, often unknown on the mainland, assumed great ideological significance in the Sicilian context, as for example in the case of the famous *Manifesto of Manfred to the Romans* contained in the Fitalia codex.<sup>66</sup>

Now these diverse sources are linked both by stylistic criteria and by the history of their transmission. The manuscript of the prince of Fitalia and the chronicle of the anonymous Palermitan thus share a part of their documentation.<sup>67</sup> This textual corpus comprising both the annalistic and the epistolary allows us to delineate a Latin culture which was characterized both by its relative originality and by its instrumental function in the construction of an urban cultural identity. On the one hand the Frederician and post-Frederician *dictamina* exploited by this textual culture were rarely the same as those employed at the same time by the other great western monarchies.<sup>68</sup> On the other hand, they nurtured a historiographic production exalting the origins and role of the city, a fact

<sup>63</sup> Giacomo Ferrai, "La storiografia del '300 e '400," *Storia della Sicilia*, 4 (Palermo, 1980), pp. 660–61 and notes, p. 674. See for a more recent account of the *Cronica* Pietro Colletta, *Storia, cultura e propaganda*, together with the earlier bibliography.

<sup>64</sup> Hans Martin Schaller, *Handschriftenverzeichnis zur Briefsammlung des Petrus de Vineca* (Hanover, 2002), n° 151, pp. 225–30 (with bibliography).

<sup>65</sup> Claudia Villa, "Raccolte documentarie e ambizioni storiografiche: il 'progetto' del manoscritto Fitalia," in Mauro De Nichilo and Grazia Distaso-Antonio Jurilli, eds., *Confini dell'Umanesimo letterario: studi in onore di Francesco Tateo* (Rome, 2003), 3: 1417–1427.

<sup>66</sup> Arsenio Frugoni, *Scritti su Manfredi*, Istituto storico italiano per il medio evo. Nuovi studi storici, 72 (Rome, 2006), pp. 45–81.

<sup>67</sup> Twelve texts contained in the ms. Fitalia may also be found in the anonymous Chronicle. Given the relative rarity of certain of these documents, there is a strong probability that the two persons who conceived these two different sets of texts extracted material from the same Palermitan collection. Regarding their links see Pietro Colletta, *Storia, cultura e propaganda*, pp. 102–114.

<sup>68</sup> Benoît Grévin, *Rhétorique du pouvoir médiéval*, pp. 539–873.

which serves to show just how profoundly the representation of Palermo and its history had been reorganized since the end of the 13th century. This written culture, whose form and themes rendered perennial the fashions of the Swabian epoch, even at the height of the 14th century, in fact served to exalt an anti-Angevin Sicilian identity, thanks to a veritable mythologization. Thus in the *Cronica* the Normans are cast far back into a fabled past, whereas Frederick II features as a tutelary figure, of more than semi-legendary status. The focus is upon the reigns of Conrad IV and Manfred, and upon the Angevin usurpation (1250–1282), the ideological foundation for Aragonese claims upon the island. It is therefore altogether as if the replacement of the Arab and Graeco-Arab populations of 12th century Palermo by new strata in the course of the 13th century had favoured the creation at further expense of an urban collective *memoria*, crystallized by the Vespers and its aftermath. It is fascinating to see how these elements were reused in the *Cronica Sicilie*,<sup>69</sup> just when this pro-Aragonese ideology seemed to be in contradiction with the concrete attitude of the forces which ended up gaining control of the city by keeping the royal power in check.<sup>70</sup> This ideological construction in fact asserted itself in the guise of a more and more theoretical dependence upon kingship.<sup>71</sup> Palermo, the symbolic capital of the Kingdom, asserted its own royal symbolism by proposing a subtle balance between its aspirations towards a measure of independence and the reference to Aragon. But this construction was done in such a fashion that it betrayed the degree to which the lack of a university, and the endemic breach with the continental part of the Sicilian Kingdom, had cut Palermo off from many of the paths leading to the “modernities” of the 14th century, whether those of Parisian nominalist scholasticism or those of Italian pre-humanism and humanism. The Palermo of the mid-14th century cultivated an institutional Latin that was heir to the 13th century, and the city seemed in some sense to be out of step with the mainland in its use of it, whereas the resistible rise of its

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<sup>69</sup> It did itself subsequently stand at the origin of a complex tradition, being later translated into Catalan, and then inspiring the chronicle *De adquisicione insule Sicilie* and its Sicilian *volgarizzamento*. See on this subject Pietro Colletta, “La cronaca *De adquisicione insule Sicilie* e il suo volgarizzamento. Appunti di ricerca,” in *Bollettino del centro di studi filologici e linguistici siciliani* 21 (2007), 215–42.

<sup>70</sup> Patrizia Sardina, *Palermo e i Chiaromonte*.

<sup>71</sup> The study by Pietro Colletta, *Storia, cultura e propaganda*, serves to illustrate this phenomenon. The author of the *Cronica Sicilie* would seem to have passed, in the course of drafting a work over many years (1338–1348), from a classically pro-royal stance to an ever firmer endorsement of the role played by the Chiaromonte.

vulgar tongues foreshadowed a stiff resistance on the part of the juridical and administrative Latin languages to processes of reorganization of chancery writing already under way in the peninsular Italy of the latter half of the 14th century.

#### THE SYMBIOSES OF THE QUATTROCENTO (1397–1492)

Indeed, the originality of 15th century Palermo would not lie in a humanist textual consumption or production, once the Catalan caesura had been surmounted and the Aragonese viceroyalty installed. Henri Bresc, in his study of the circulation of books in Sicily from the 13th to the 15th century, has certainly succeeded in bringing out the occasional limited presence of libraries, the composition of which reveals the permeability of a fraction of the urban elites to humanist fashions,<sup>72</sup> whereas the reading of other notables tends rather to reflect a nobiliary culture, oriented towards the consumption of a chivalric literature.<sup>73</sup> Associated with the circulation of religious or juridical works more commonly found in the possession of the island's urban elites, these two components—Latin and humanist, or vulgar (written in Sicilian, French, Catalan or Castilian) and nobiliary—of urban written culture tally with the average tastes shared by the elites of the West Mediterranean arc (crown of Aragon, Provence, Italy . . .) into which Sicily was then integrated. If Palermo lacked a university, the Aragonese authorities having in the end chosen Catania to be the seat of a long-delayed foundation,<sup>74</sup> it was not short of schools and of teachers of Latin (Giovanni Nasone, fl. 1470), indeed of Greek (Giacomo Mirabella), capable of training their pupils according to the new standards prevailing on the mainland.<sup>75</sup> But they were not necessarily of Palermitan origin, nor destined to teach for very long in Palermo (Antonio Cassarino, the brilliant teacher of Pietro Ranzano, a native of Noto, taught in Palermo in 1431–1433 before leaving the island for Constantinople, Venice and Genoa).<sup>76</sup> The city was therefore not radically different from a

<sup>72</sup> Henri Bresc, *Livre et société*, pp. 95–102, commenting in particular on the inventory of the jurist Leonardo Bartholomeo (who died during the revolt of 1450), see inventory n° 106A, pp. 185–191.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 102–104.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>75</sup> Marco Vattasso, *Antonio Flaminio e le principali poesie dell'autografo vaticano 2870*, Studi e testi 1 (Vatican, 1900), pp. 10–11.

<sup>76</sup> See Gianvito Resta, "Antonio Cassarino," in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, 21, 1978, pp. 442–46.

certain number of urban centres on the Italian peninsula which supplied the most brilliant courts with their contingents of humanists. But though Pietro Ranzano, Antonio Beccadelli (il Panormita) or Antonio Flamino (Biaxander) are often paraded as symbols of this “Palermitan humanism,” they in fact spent much of their lives on the mainland, obeying a logic of expatriation which underscores the absence of a curial milieu capable of promoting the activities of humanist patronage in the Palermo of the 15th century. This observation admittedly does not rule out variations in the behaviour of these humanists towards their city of origin. Il Panormita, whose literary career was essentially played out on the mainland, later, thanks to the munificence of Alfonso X, accumulated offices and property in Palermo, but it was at Naples, in the second half of his career, that his literary contribution was chiefly made.<sup>77</sup> Pietro Ranzano, who maintained links with Palermo for the greater part of his life, but also spent most of his time on the mainland, incorporated into his oeuvre a glorification of Palermitan history, thus perpetuating a 14th century tradition and according a place, not without misunderstandings on his part, to the polyglot dimension of the city’s different cultures.<sup>78</sup>

Perhaps of more significance in any assessment of the Palermitan culture of the fifteenth century is the last avatar through which the culture of the *dictamen* then passed, welcomed only at the prompting of the “continentalized” Sicilian court in the 13th century, and developed along its own lines in 14th century Palermo. In the 15th century, the vice-royal chancellery of Palermo, though still communicating sporadically in the Iberian languages (Catalan, Castilian),<sup>79</sup> developed in effect an administrative language which implemented in so elaborate a fashion a symbiosis between an aulic Sicilian calqued upon Tuscan and Latin that the outcome may be described as a hybrid language.<sup>80</sup> This aulic Sicilian in fact functioned by

<sup>77</sup> Ornella Francisci Osti and Silvia Meloni, “Beccadelli, Antonio, detto il Panormita,” in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, 7, 1965, pp. 406–413.

<sup>78</sup> Henri Bresc, *Arabes de langue, juifs de religion. L'évolution du judaïsme sicilien dans l'environnement latin XII<sup>e</sup>–XV<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris, 2001), p. 67. On Pietro Ranzano (1426/7–1492–1493), his Sicilian education, his activities in Sicily and on the Italian peninsula, see Bruno Figliuolo, “L’umanista e teologo palermitano Pietro Ranzano (1426/27–1492/93),” in Id., *La cultura a Napoli nel secondo Quattrocento. Ritratti di Protagonisti*, (Udine, 1997), pp. 87–276, and finally Pietro Ranzano, *Descriptio totius Italiae (Annales, XIV–XV)*, ed. Adele di Lorenzo, Bruno Figliuolo and Paolo Pontari, Edizione nazionale dei testi della storiografia umanistica, 3 (Florence, 2007), Introduction, pp. 3–56.

<sup>79</sup> Bresc, “La pratique linguistique,” pp. 653–654.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 656 and Benoît Grévin, “L’alternance latin-sicilien dans les actes siciliens du XV<sup>e</sup> siècle,” *Cahiers Électroniques d’Histoire du LAMOP* 2 (2009), 1–27.

employing a principle of code switching: in the viceroial deeds, the passages written in a vulgar tongue structurally close to Tuscan, but featuring some markers identifying it as Sicilian, alternated with passages written in an administrative Latin bequeathed by the *dictamen*, so as to form a composite whole whose functionality was in part symbolic. This mixed language, last avatar of the cultures of the *dictamen* in the three-pointed island, recovered to its own advantage, by sicilianizing them, the charismatic qualities of chancellery Latin. Its regional imprint contrasts, in an identity-giving guise, with the—in part analogous—forms developed in the continental chancelleries (chancellery Neapolitan etc.). Linguistic studies of 15th century chancellery Italians have as yet been conducted in too piecemeal a fashion for it to be possible to assess how far this chancellery “Latino-Sicilian” differs in the degree of integration achieved between its two, functionally interchangeable registers from its continental counterparts. Whatever its intrinsic originality may have been, it was through the provisional consolidation of this chancellery language that the Palermitan dimension of Sicilian Romanic cultures of the 15th century was most clearly asserted.

But if the Palermo of 1450 was incontestably a city in which Romanic influences were predominant, other aspects need also to be taken into account. Indeed, we still have to describe the integration into the diverse currents of the Quattrocento of the most original component of these Palermitan linguistic and textual cultures of the waning middle ages, namely, the use of Arabic, or rather of Judaeo-Arabic, as cultivated by the island’s Jewish elites. Here too current research—though tending to reassess the persistence of a written and oral use of a Judaeo-Arabic with a more and more Latinized vocabulary, and yet still very much alive,<sup>81</sup> particularly in the communities on the western point of the island (Trapani, Sciacca, Caltabellotta, Palermo)—does not yet allow us to obtain an overall vision of the practices of copying, writing and reading Arabic in 15th century Palermo. The presence, or the settlement through immigration to Palermo of Jewish men of letters originally from Spain or from Africa (Arabic-speaking/Romance-speaking), capable of moving within two diglossic systems (Latin/Romance; middle Judaeo-Arabic-Arabic/Hebrew-Aramaic) is nevertheless very well documented. There are even indications that at the beginning of the 15th century the Palermitan communities could have been a centre for particularly original textual productions in the context

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<sup>81</sup> Bresc, *Arabes de langue, juifs de religion*, pp. 40–51.

of West Mediterranean Judaism, for example the copy of the Koran written in Hebrew characters Vat.Ebr.357, perhaps done in Palermo around 1406.<sup>82</sup> But aside from such testimonies to their vitality, the cultural history of the Palermitan Jewish communities of the 15th century imitates, though with its own particular features, the dynamic of the dominant Latin community, and its peripheral nature. If the more prominent Arabophony of Palermo differentiates it from Messina, which was predominantly Graeco-Latin, or from Catania, it was nevertheless the case that the Sicilian Jewish men of letters capable of acquiring and transmitting a written Arabic culture at a high level, scientific (medical or astronomical treatises), religious or, indeed, pragmatic (deciphering of documents from the Norman chancellery, political interpretation), were not concentrated in Palermo. The city, once again, appeared to be more akin to a sort of sieve, or place of assembly of competences scattered across the urban centres of the island, and for which it served as a staging-post. The trajectory of the Belladeb/ibn al-Ahdab family, which had immigrated from Spain at the end of the 14th century, and settled in Palermo, although after a long and productive stay in the Syracusan community,<sup>83</sup> is in this regard just as instructive as that of the Christian convert Guglielmo Raimondo Moncada (circa 1445–1489?). The latter, a native of Caltabellotta, probably educated at Sciacca—two important centres of Sicilian Judaism, sixty or so kilometres south of Palermo—lost no time after his conversion (circa 1465) in exploiting his linguistic competences in Arabic, Hebrew and Aramaic in the service of his lay and ecclesiastical protectors (the Sicilian viceregal authorities, the King of Aragon, Cardinal Cybo, the future Innocent VIII . . .).<sup>84</sup> At one point this strategy seemed about to involve Palermo, thanks to the backing of the Aragonese. In the 1470s the viceregal authorities thus sponsored a plan to create, specifically for Moncada, a Studium reserved for the teaching of Semitic languages, at first intended for

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<sup>82</sup> Angelo Michele Piemontese, "Il Corano latino di Ficino e i corani arabi di Pico e Moncathes," in *Rinascimento* 36 (1996), 254–273; Benoît Grévin, "Le Coran de Mithridate (Vat. Ebr. 357) à la croisée des savoirs arabes dans l'Italie du XV<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Al-Qanṭara* 31 (2010), 513–548.

<sup>83</sup> Benoît Grévin and Giuseppe Mandalà, "Le rôle des communautés juives sicilienne dans la transmission des savoirs arabes en Italie," in Albrecht Fuss and Bernard Heyberger, eds., *La frontière méditerranéenne du XV<sup>e</sup> au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, échanges, circulations et affrontements. Actes du colloque de Tours, 17–20 juin 2009*, in press.

<sup>84</sup> On the career of Moncada, see Mauro Perani, ed., *Guglielmo Raimondo Moncada alias Flavio Mitridate. Un ebreo converso siciliano. Atti del Convegno Internazionale Caltabellotta (Agrigento) 23–24 ottobre 2004* (Palermo 2008), with bibliography.

Agrigento and then for Palermo itself.<sup>85</sup> However, these projects fell through, and once the hybrid intellectual, who combined the competences and the habituses of a Sicilian Jewish man of letters and of a Latin court humanist, had acquired enough of an aura, he emigrated to the mainland in order to cash in his knowledge there (1478–1489).<sup>86</sup>

In the complex game in which the great Italian centres sought to play their trumps in the marketplace of humanism, between 1450 and 1500 Palermo, when all is said and done, could only muster low value cards. Admittedly the city could bet on the persisting Arabophony of a part of its population, and something of an analogy may perhaps be drawn here with Messina, which then liked to present itself, on account of its Greek heritage, as a new Athens. Along with the relative influence won for it by the presence of the vicerojal chancellery and by its status as the first city on the island, this residual Arabophony enabled Palermo to exercise a certain attraction, by drawing in Jewish men of letters originating in various parts of the island, and by then reexporting these original forms of knowledge, together with other more banal ones, to the wider Italian context. This persisting originality sounded like a faint echo of the role performed by the city in an infinitely more brilliant fashion in the 12th century Mediterranean. Little or nothing of this brilliance survived, however, the rupture effected by the expulsion of the Jews at the end of the 15th century, in 1492.

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<sup>85</sup> Raffaele Starrabba, "Guglielmo Raimondo Moncada ebreo convertito siciliano del secolo XV," *Archivio storico siciliano*, n. S. 3 (1878), 68–73, n° 16, 1477 (act modifying the arrangements introduced in 1476 in favour of Agrigento, to the advantage of Palermo).

<sup>86</sup> Benoît Grévin, "Le Coran de Mithridate."

THE JEWS OF PALERMO FROM LATE ANTIQUITY TO THE EXPULSION  
(598–1492-93)\*

Giuseppe Mandalà

The history of the Jews in Palermo has yet to be written. Theirs was a discreet but continuous presence that, despite the light shone or shadows cast by contingent events, furnished a backdrop throughout the middle ages, telling of a community deeply rooted in the urban fabric and social structure of the island's capital. Though a community that was always in a minority in relation to the political and religious bodies which organized the territory, it was at the centre of the Mediterranean networks and therefore constantly evolving. The Jews of Palermo, like the island as a whole, tended to find themselves, depending upon the epoch or the context in question, on the frontier between two worlds, Islamic and Christian; there arose as a consequence a diachronic dialogue with the Arab-Islamic world, sustained by a cultural inheritance which differentiates the Sicilian Jews from the other communities present in the peninsula.

The few vestiges of the Jewish artistic or monumental patrimony to have survived within the present-day urban fabric have been very little or not at all investigated. Indeed, aside from a few historical sources of a narrative kind, the presence of the Jews in Palermo can today best be apprehended and reconstructed through two quite exceptional documentary clusters, namely, the papers deriving from the Cairo Geniza (end of the 10th-first half of the 13th century) and the documents preserved in the Sicilian archives (end of the 13th-first half of the 16th century).<sup>1</sup>

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Abbreviations

AE = Henri Bresc, *Arabi per lingua, Ebrei per religione. L'evoluzione dell'ebraismo siciliano in ambiente latino dal XII al XV secolo* (Messina, 2001).

JS = Shlomo Simonsohn, *The Jews in Sicily, I–XVIII* (Leiden-New York-Köln, 1997–2010).

RF = *Il registro della cancelleria di Federico II del 1239–1240*, ed. Cristina Carbonetti Venditelli (Roma, 2002), *Fonti per la Storia dell'Italia Medievale, Antiquitates*, 19.

SC = Shlomo Simonsohn, *Between Scylla and Charybdis. The Jews in Sicily* (Leiden-Boston, 2011).

\* The research for this essay has been carried out within the project "Islam and religious dissidence in Early Modern Spain: between Reformation and Counter-Reformation Europe" (FF12010–17745) directed by Mercedes García-Arenal.

<sup>1</sup> For the Geniza texts see: Menahem Ben Sasson, *The Jews of Sicily (825–1068)* (Jerusalem, 1991); Moshe Gil, Shlomo Simonsohn, "More on the History of the Jews in Sicily in the



We are concerned here with a large quantity of materials which provide a perspective that is partial and in the main filtered by a milieu external to the Palermitan community, but which, in the absence of any internal documentation, casts an extraordinarily intense light upon aspects of Palermitan Jewish life about which we would otherwise be entirely ignorant. Far from intending to exhaust the argument in the space of these pages, I shall limit myself to providing a portrait serving to establish a few key points and to stimulate more extensive treatments of the same questions.

#### FROM LATE ANTIQUITY TO THE ISLAMIC PERIOD (598–1072)

##### *From the Late Antiquity to the 10th Century*

The principal evidence we have for a Jewish presence on the island in the first thousand years of the Christian era is provided by epigraphs and archaeological testimonies, concentrated above all in Eastern Sicily, to which one could add a handful of scattered references in the literary sources. The first information relating to the Jews in Palermo reaches us by way of the correspondence of Gregory the Great; in the year 598 the Pope, whose mother was Palermitan, intervened on behalf of the local Jewish community when it was subject to abuses at the hands of Victor, bishop of Palermo.<sup>2</sup>

In the year 831 Palermo was conquered by the Muslim armies; from this date the city became a part of the *dār al-Islām*.<sup>3</sup> The Muslim conquest of the island went on for several decades, being completed midway through the 10th century. From the political and administrative point of view the island was now a province (*wilāya*) of the Aghlabid emirate of Ifrīqiya; after 909 Sicily came under the sway of the Fatimid caliphate, established first in Ifrīqiya, and then, from 973, in Egypt; from the second half of the 10th century, the Kalbid emirs of Palermo, the local rulers answerable to the Fatimid caliphs, became a hereditary dynasty which tended to acquire

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Norman Period", in *Daniel Carpi Jubilee Volume. A Collection of Studies in the History of the Jewish People presented to Daniel Carpi upon his 70th Birthday by his colleagues and students* (Tel Aviv, 1996), pp. 23–57; for an English translation, and for the documents preserved in the Sicilian archives, see *JS*. For the documentary sources relating to Jews who converted and neophytes after the expulsion see Nadia Zeldes, *The Former Jews of this Kingdom. Sicilian Converts after the Expulsion (1492–1516)* (Leiden, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> *JS*, 1: 19, 20.

<sup>3</sup> See the article by Annliese Nef, "Islamic Palermo" in the present volume.

a steadily increasing degree of independence from the North African powers. The Kalbids ruled until c. 1040, when the political unity of the island fragmented, and Palermo's centrality was challenged; the island as a whole was claimed by local leaders vying each for the upper hand, a situation of crisis and anarchy exacerbated by the Byzantine intervention (1038–1043) and by the imminent arrival of the Normans (1061).<sup>4</sup> During the Islamic period Palermo, the ancient Panormos, was called Balarm in Arabic and Palorm or Palerm(u) in Hebrew; the city was also called madīnat Ṣiqilliyya, the city of Sicily, a name then abbreviated to al-Madīna/the City or Ṣiqilliyya/Sicily; someone who was a resident or who originated there was therefore termed *al-madīnī* or *al-ṣiqillī*.

In the Islamic period the Jews of Sicily were organised into communities, following the Rabbanite observance and under the aegis of the academy of Palestine; the communities enjoyed a measure of autonomy in internal religious and legal questions, and were administered by authorities which represented them before the Islamic governmental and administrative structures. As in the *dār al-Islām* as a whole, so too in Sicily the religious minorities were subject to *ḍimma* status; this amounted to protection accorded to Jews and Christians, in return for political submission, the payment of specific taxes (*jizya* and *kharāj*) and, from time to time, the observance of particular obligations, amongst them the wearing of a badge.<sup>5</sup>

The documentation of the Jewish presence in Palermo during the 9th and 10th centuries is decidedly thin; the city was a stronghold of the Mediterranean *jihād* and as a consequence became a centre for the collecting and trade in prisoners and slaves. Thus, a letter from the monk Theodosius (878–879) refers to the presence of Jews in the Palermitan emiral prisons, and it was likewise to Palermo that some relatives of Shabbetai Donnolo were transferred, having escaped from a Fatimid raid on Oria (925).<sup>6</sup> News of the forcible conversion of Jews having taken place in 873/74 ought perhaps to be ascribed to the early part of the rule of the

<sup>4</sup> On the history of Muslim Sicily the standard work of reference is Michele Amari, *Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia*, 2nd edition, ed. Carlo Alfonso Nallino (Catania, 1933–1939); regarding the light shed on the Jews of Sicily by the documents from the Geniza see Moshe Gil, "Sicily 827–1072, in light of the Geniza documents and parallel sources," in *Gli ebrei di Sicilia sino all'espulsione del 1492. Atti del V convegno internazionale Italia Judaica (Palermo 1992)* (Rome, 1995), pp. 96–171.

<sup>5</sup> Mark R. Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross. The Jews in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1994), pp. 52–74.

<sup>6</sup> *JS*, 1: 24, 25.

Aghlabid emir Ibrāhīm II;<sup>7</sup> likewise in Palermo, in 888, it was once again Ibrāhīm II who imposed a badge on persons and immovable property, namely, a monkey for Jews and a pig for Christians.<sup>8</sup>

In the second half of the 10th century the Palermitan Jewish community seems already to be an integral part of the Fatimid world and of its administration; as is suggested by the title of “defender of the communities of the people of God who lived in Egypt and the land of Israel, in Palermo and in Ifrīqiya and in the whole territory of Ishmael” attributed to Paṭṭi’el b. Shefaṭya, a metahistorical figure purportedly employed in the service of the Fatimid caliphs who embodied the ideal type of the Jew who had risen to the highest ranks of the administration.<sup>9</sup>

*Palermo and Sicily in the Documents from the Cairo Geniza*

Between the end of the 10th century and the first seventy years of the 11th century Palermo and its Jewish community were indubitably at the centre of the economic and commercial triangle between Egypt, Ifrīqiya and Sicily documented by the letters of the Geniza. We are concerned in the main with a mercantile correspondence, written by Jews who were Sicilian or who were in transit; there is no shortage, however, of another type of document, such as judicial depositions, legal opinions and official letters addressed by the community of Palermo to other communities in the Fatimid empire.<sup>10</sup>

The documents from the Geniza involving Islamic Sicily are 129 all told, and are concentrated in the second half of the 11th century (93 documents), an epistolary acceleration due to the climate of instability introduced by the Kalbid dynasty and by the political crisis which overwhelmed Ifrīqiya during the 11th century.<sup>11</sup> Such a corpus represents a significant sample, but

<sup>7</sup> JS, 1: 23.

<sup>8</sup> JS, 1: 24a; Amari, *Storia*, 1: p. 614; 2: p. 75.

<sup>9</sup> *The Chronicle of Ahima’as, with a collection of poems from Byzantine Southern Italy*, ed. and annot. Benjamin Klar (Jerusalem, 1944), p. 36; Cesare Colafemmina, “Un medico ebreo di Oria alla corte dei Fāṭimidi,” *Materia giudaica* XI, 1–2 (2006), 5–12.

<sup>10</sup> Gil, “Sicily”, p. 131; Annliese Nef, “La Sicile dans la documentation de la Geniza cairote (fin X<sup>e</sup>–XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle): les réseaux attestés et leur nature,” in Damien Coulon, Christophe Picard, Dominique Valérian, ed., *Espaces et réseaux en Méditerranée (VI<sup>e</sup>–XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, vol. 1. *La configuration des réseaux* (Paris, 2007), pp. 273–91.

<sup>11</sup> The documents, as is the norm in the Geniza, come from the political capital of the region, where judicial, religious and commercial life was concentrated. 24 such documents were written at Palermo, dated as follows: 3 at some point in the 11th century; 7 in the first half of the 11th century; 12 in the second half of the 11th century; 2 in the second half of the 12th century, see Nef, “La Sicile,” pp. 278, 282.

one that is skewed in favour of the elites and does not properly reflect the whole of the commercial traffic involving the island in the Islamic period (for example, important exchanges with the mainland do not feature); Palermo and Mazara were at the centre of the Jewish commercial networks in the island, even if mentions of other localities such as Demenna, Messina, Syracuse, Ragusa and Trapani are not wanting. The exchanges occur in the context of networks managed by big merchants and shipowners, based upon relationships of trust and ties of a familial kind. The goods that are imported are rare items and luxury products: Egyptian linen, some products indispensable in the textile industry, namely, ammonia, lacquer, brazilwood and indigo; spices and among them pepper above all (in part exported once again towards the Christian West, to judge by the quantities), and not least salt and pearls. The exports consisted of raw silk (the Sicilian *lāsīn*) and other precious fabrics such as turbans and veils, but also hides, cheeses and almonds. Small quantities of oil and wheat to meet particular needs were also exported.<sup>12</sup> Transactions frequently involved Sicilian currency, the *rubāʿī*, the quarter dinars minted on the island and indeed called *ṭarī* ("the new; the fresh"), a highly valued coin. Finally, Jewish merchants seem not to have had a specialisation along confessional lines, if one excepts the *kosher* cheese exported from Sicily in the 13th century.<sup>13</sup>

In 11th-Century Sicily the *jizya*, that is the poll tax, paid by Jews was around 13 *tarī* (a figure that corresponded to a little over 3 dinars); a change in political circumstances around 1020 led to the *jizya* being increased by a third (4 *tarī* and 1/3), a measure that forced the poor to emigrate from the island.<sup>14</sup> The same political instability led the Muslim authorities to decide to tighten controls over the tithe (*ʿushr*) paid by foreign merchants on imported goods; the measure sparked serious unrest among the foreign Jewish merchants, who had been used to evading this tax by attributing the ownership of imported goods to their local co-religionists. The *dayyan*

<sup>12</sup> Linen (over 50 attestations); grain, oil, indigo, silk, pepper (over 30 attestations); pearls, salt, ammonia, garments and textiles (between 20 and 30 attestations); brazilwood, wax, lacquer, saffron, *lāsīn* silk (between 15–20 attestations); camphor, cinnamon, myrabolan, hides, lead, soap and sugar (between 10 and 15 attestations); aloe, almonds, cardamom, cornelian, leather, lapis lazuli (between 5 and 10 attestations), Nef, "La Sicile," p. 290.

<sup>13</sup> Nadia Zeldes and Miriam Frankel, "Trade with Sicily. Jewish merchants in Mediterranean Trade in the 12th and 13th Centuries," in Nicolò Bucaria, ed. *Gli ebrei in Sicilia dal tardoantico al medioevo. Studi in onore di Mons. Benedetto Rocco* (Palermo, 1998), pp. 243–56.

<sup>14</sup> *JS*, 1: 39; Gil, "Sicily," p. 142.

of Palermo, Mašli'aḥ ben Eliyya, an active businessman, was himself involved, and thrown into prison along with some of his co-religionists.<sup>15</sup>

From the juridical point of view the Jewish communities (*qahal*) had at their disposal property, movable and immovable, and a cemetery; they enjoyed autonomy as a community, were administered by elders and presided over by a *bet din*, a rabbinical court. Arbitration tribunals were also held in Palermo, for example in 1063, when a dispute was settled in favour of the '*aniyye Sišiliya* (the poor of Sicily), that is, a charitable foundation of Palermo or *heqdash*.<sup>16</sup> Around 970 the goods of one Bundār of Palermo, an emancipated slave, who bequeathed one quarter of his property, according to Islamic law, once again went to the poor, of Jerusalem on this occasion; the transfer of the money was handled by Shemu'el b. Hosha'na, the head of the Palestinian Academy.<sup>17</sup> Some letters inform us about relations between the community of Palermo and the Palestinian Academy of Jerusalem so far as collections were concerned: 20 dinars were shipped from Sicily on 7 May 1029, 35 dinars around 1035.<sup>18</sup> Aside from Jerusalem, the community of Palermo established relationships with Alexandria, Fuṣṭāt, al-Qayrawān and al-Mahdiyya<sup>19</sup> and when necessary begged for help from eminent protectors,<sup>20</sup> who benefited it, as was the case with Shemu'el Ibn Naghrīla (993–1055) *nagid* of the Jews of Granada.<sup>21</sup>

The documents from the Geniza indicate some clashes with the Muslim milieu; one letter mentions "the survivors of the community of Palermo";<sup>22</sup> whereas around 1025 Yosef b. Shemu'el al-Dānī, having been shipwrecked off the Libyan coast, reached Palermo only to find his house destroyed and occupied by a man from Barqa;<sup>23</sup> after 1035 the Jewish cemetery, having been taken over by the Muslim authorities, was redeemed with cash payments.<sup>24</sup> A letter written to Alexandria on 6 September 1056 speaks of the emotion aroused by the conversion of Yosef b. Shabbetai, the cantor (*hazzan*) of Palermo.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>15</sup> *JS*, 1: 108, 109, 135; Gil, "Sicily," pp. 142–44.

<sup>16</sup> *JS*, 1: 148.

<sup>17</sup> *JS*, 1: 26.

<sup>18</sup> *JS*, 1: 44; 55.

<sup>19</sup> *JS*, 1: 36, 39, 57, 58.

<sup>20</sup> *JS*, 1: 50.

<sup>21</sup> Abraham ibn Daud, *The Book of Tradition (Sefer ha-Qabbalah)*, ed. Gerson D. Cohen (Philadelphia, 1967), Hebrew text p. 56; trans. p. 74.

<sup>22</sup> *JS*, 1: 50.

<sup>23</sup> *JS*, 1: 42.

<sup>24</sup> *JS*, 1: 85.

<sup>25</sup> *JS*, 1: 111.

The Sicilian *fitna*, the civil war, caused the Jews many problems; around 1045 the city of Palermo was governed by a Muslim council (*shūra/jamā'a*) and commercial traffic was still more or less regular;<sup>26</sup> from 1050 onwards the letters refer to problems of trade and of navigation. Yet when the Jewish merchants speak of the enemy they refer to the Christians, *Rūm* and *Edom*, be they Norman or Byzantine; in September 1056 a Jewish merchant bewails the high taxes exacted on the island and relates that his goods have been raided off Agrigento by the men of Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. al-Thumna, Muslim *qā'id*, lord of Syracuse, Catania and Noto (d. 1062), who would later call upon the Normans to come to his aid.<sup>27</sup>

#### FROM THE NORMANS TO THE ANGEVINS (1072–1282)

In 1061 the Normans led by Robert Guiscard and by his brother Roger I landed in Sicily, the Muslims having invoked their aid; in the space of ten short years they conquered Messina, the Valdemone and Palermo (1072), and in the following twenty years they occupied the whole of the island (1091). In 1130 Roger II founded the *Regnum Siciliae*, later inherited by the Emperor Frederick II of Swabia (1194–1250); with the fall of the Swabians (1266–1268) the island passed into the hands of the Angevins, and the political and administrative centre of the Kingdom was transferred to Naples up until 1282.

#### *The Norman Conquest seen through the Documents from the Geniza*

There is frequent comment upon the Norman conquest in the letters of the Geniza. For example, in 1058, writing from al-Mahdiyya, the *dayyan* Labrāṭ b. Mūsā b. Sughmār compares the victories of the Christians in the Iberian peninsula to those of the Normans in Sicily, and adds that the Jews had been concerned about the fate of Sicily ever since *Edom* had begun amassing huge forces around the island.<sup>28</sup> Around 1065 a letter from Alexandria notes that only Palermo, Mazara and Qaṣr Yannih (Enna) remain in Muslim hands while, given the impossibility of traversing the

<sup>26</sup> Gil, "Sicily," pp. 116, 118, 130 n. 10.

<sup>27</sup> *JS*, 1: 111, 147; A. Nef, "La *fitna* sicilienne: une *fitna* inachevée?", *Médiévales* 60 (2011), 103–116.

<sup>28</sup> *JS*, 1: 122.

territory, contact between Palermo and Mazara could only take place by sea.<sup>29</sup>

The corpus of documents from the Geniza also furnishes information regarding events and personages about whom little is otherwise known; between 1056 and 1065 Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Ṣā’igh, known as Ibn al-Ba‘ba‘, a powerful shipowner employed by various prominent political figures in the region, often features. In 1069 Ibn al-Ba‘ba‘ was the *sultān* of Palermo, and remained in command of the city up until 1072, a period during which his commercial activities are no longer attested; Ibn al-Ba‘ba‘ appointed as *nagid* of the Jews of Palermo Zakkār b. ‘Ammār, brother of Ḥayyim the *wakīl* of the Sicilian merchants in Egypt. According to the Arabic-Islamic sources, Ibn al-Ba‘ba‘ surrendered Palermo to the Normans, and was immediately afterwards put to death, in 1072.<sup>30</sup>

The arrival of the Normans does not represent a marked caesura for the society documented by the Geniza; at the beginning of the 12th Century Jewish trade suffered attacks by pirates, the loss of ships and some confiscations of merchandise; yet in the course of that century the island did not lose its attractions as a place to live, although the exchanges handled by the merchants of the Geniza grew rarer, being gradually replaced by networks of Pisan, Genoese and Venetian merchants. However, the surviving documentation suggests that in the Norman-Swabian kingdom the Jews little by little became an economic group specialising in the manufacture of prestige goods (silk and dyeing) and in loans.<sup>31</sup>

### *Juridical Status and Norman-Swabian Legislation*

Mosaic law was recognised as part of a broader autonomy enjoyed by the religious communities, as testified by the Catanian privilege of 1168: *Latini, Graeci, Iudaei et Saraceni unusquisque juxta suam legem judicetur*.<sup>32</sup> In the reign of Roger II the Jewish religion came to form part of an oecumenical project which found its icon in the quadrigraphic epigraph of Anna,

<sup>29</sup> *JS*, 1: 158; Ruth Gertwagen, "Geniza Letters: Maritime Difficulties along the Alexandria-Palermo Route," in Sophia Menache, ed., *Communication in the Jewish Diaspora* (Leiden-New York-Köln, 1998), pp. 221–41.

<sup>30</sup> *JS*, 1: 78, 93, 104, 109, 122, 139, 149, 151, 156, 161–64.

<sup>31</sup> Raphael Straus, *Gli Ebrei di Sicilia dai Normanni a Federico II*, ed. Salvatore Mazzamuto (Palermo, 1992), pp. 65–74; *AE*, p. 33.

<sup>32</sup> *JS*, 1: 187.

mother of the priest Grisantus (1148–49),<sup>33</sup> an ambitious programme which soon entered into crisis, with the trial of Philip of al-Mahdiyya (1154).<sup>34</sup>

The Norman-Swabian state perpetuated laws and institutions of the *dār al-Islām*, combining them with Roman law tradition and with the requirements of canon law; the Jews, like the Muslims, enjoyed a subaltern status and were subject to tribute, in exchange for which they were granted religious liberty and juridical autonomy within their own communities, but they were required to pay the *jizya* and were in theory obliged to wear a badge; there was also a ban on the building of new synagogues, on exercising any authority over Christians and also on circumcising slaves.<sup>35</sup>

The Norman sovereigns accorded the Jews a type of servitude, better described as a *fidelitas*, which was counterposed to a burgher liberty, the privilege of the Latin immigrants; the Jews were bound to the *Dīwān* by a particular obligation, and the taxes levied on their economic activities were awarded to religious institutions or to fief-holders, just as the donations of Greek and Muslim villeins were. In 1089 Sichelgaita, widow of Robert Guiscard, ceded 1/6 of the rents of the Palermitan Jews to archbishop Alcherius for the church of Santa Maria in Palermo, the Cathedral, and further stipulated that the totality of such rents should be ceded after her death.<sup>36</sup>

A similar course of action was followed by Tancred, who, in 1191, donated the goods belonging to the Jew ‘Alī b. Ṣalāḥ to the church of Santa Maria della Grotta in Palermo.<sup>37</sup> In 1194 Henry VI Hohenstaufen entered Palermo and confirmed the status quo.<sup>38</sup> His son and successor, Frederick II, abided by tradition and renewed the concession to the Cathedral of the rights over the Jews of Palermo, specifying what they consisted of: a poll tax (*gisía*), a gabelle on wine and on the slaughterhouse; the emperor also granted the Palermitan church a monopoly over the dyeing of cloth: the Jews were therefore deemed to be *homines Ecclesiae*.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Jeremy Johns, “Le iscrizioni e le epigrafi in arabo: una rilettura,” in Maria Andaloro, ed., *Nobiles Officinae. Perle, filigrane e trame di seta dal Palazzo Reale di Palermo* (Catania, 2006), 1, pp. 519–23; 2, pp. 47–67: 53.

<sup>34</sup> JS, 1: 172; Annliese Nef, “Pluralisme religieux et Etat monarchique dans la Sicile des XII<sup>e</sup>–XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle,” in Henri Bresc, Georges Dagher, Christiane Veauvy, eds., *Politique et religion en Méditerranée. Moyen Âge et époque contemporaine* (Paris, 2008), pp. 237–55.

<sup>35</sup> JS, 1: 195; AE, pp. 30–35.

<sup>36</sup> JS, 1: 166.

<sup>37</sup> JS, 1: 191.

<sup>38</sup> JS, 1: 192.

<sup>39</sup> The privilege, formerly granted to archbishop Parisius in perpetuity in 1210 and in 1211, was reinstated by archbishop Berardus for six years, JS, 1: 206, 207, 209.



Under the influence of canon law and of the Fourth Lateran Council, in 1221 Frederick promulgated a discriminatory piece of legislation: the obligation for men not to shave their beards and to dress in light blue, and for women to wear a badge, a circle (*rudellum*) of the same colour.<sup>40</sup> No trace of this legislation may be found in the Constitutions of Melfi (1231); in them the royal protection extended to Jews and Muslims is total, even if the differences in rank are dramatically emphasised: the Jews have the right to practice usury provided it is not in excess of 10% a year (I, 6); Jews and Muslims enjoy the privilege of *defensa* against accusations (I, 18); they are included within royal protection, that is to say, if a city conceals a malefactor, it must indemnify the felonies perpetrated by him even upon Jews and Muslims (I, 27); in case of felony there is a fine of 100 *augustales* if the victim is a Christian, or of 50 if he is Jewish or Muslim (I, 28).<sup>41</sup>

The status of Jews and Muslims changed radically in 1236, when the religious minorities in the Kingdom became *servi camere regie*, and therefore entered into the direct service of the sovereign, who assured them of his protection while the royal treasury received the fiscal income.<sup>42</sup> In the Kingdom of Sicily the first known Jew to enjoy the new protection was *magister Busach de Panormo iudeus medicus, servus camere nostre fidelis noster*,<sup>43</sup> who in 1237 was granted a perpetual exemption, for himself and for his descendants, from the contributions owed by the Palermitan community; subsequently the same privileges would be renewed by Manfred (1258) and from 1283 by the Aragonese sovereigns also.<sup>44</sup>

From the middle of the 13th century, the cities too, along with State and Church, had some influence concerning the Jews; the *Consuetudines* of Palermo stipulated that Christians could testify against Jews, but not vice versa; furthermore Jews could not give judgements against, or arbitrate between Christians (15); Jews and Muslims did not enjoy the *ius prothimiseos*, any more than noble and ecclesiastical institutions did (27); the sales of movable and immovable property effected by Saracens, Jews and Greeks residing in Sicily were legally valid, and all documents relating to sales and exchanges, along with all contracts, composed “in the Arabic, Greek or Hebrew language” and drafted “by the hand of notaries among

<sup>40</sup> *JS*, 1: 210.

<sup>41</sup> *JS*, 1: 211.

<sup>42</sup> David Abulafia, “The Servitude of Jews and Muslims in the Medieval Mediterranean: Origins and Diffusions,” *MEFRM* 122, 2 (2000), 687–714.

<sup>43</sup> *JS*, 1: 214.

<sup>44</sup> *JS*, 1: 224, 248; Giuseppe Mandalà, “Aḥiṭuv ben Yiṣḥaq da Palermo, medico, filosofo e traduttore del secolo XIII,” *Materia Giudaica* XIII, 1–2 (2008), 35–61: 42–53.

the Saracens, the Greeks, or among the Jews or the Arabs” should be considered *firma et stabilia* even in cases where they lacked the *sollempnitates* proper to the documents of the “Christians” (36); finally, the King and his officers could not request arbitrary payments from prostitutes, butchers and Jews (77).<sup>45</sup> After Frederick II’s death the bishops of Agrigento (1255, 1266) and Messina (1267) managed to buy back the rights over the Jews of Sicily which they had lost;<sup>46</sup> in 1274 the Palermitan Church was given authorization to collect the proceeds from the *tinctoria*, *platea someriorum*, *domus setae*, *cabella fumi*, etc.<sup>47</sup>

*Migration and Settlement: The Jews of the Garbo and Their Antecedents*

Norman Palermo was a city in full demographic and urbanistic expansion, at any rate up until the outbreak of the revolts of the Muslims of Sicily (from 1189–90); 1500 Jews lived there, according to the testimony of Benjamin of Tudela (1173).<sup>48</sup> The Jewish community had also been enriched demographically through the influx of privileged immigrants, such as the Jews coming from central Greece (Corinth, Thebes and Athens), deported in 1147, during the reign of Roger II, and benefiting the royal factories.<sup>49</sup> Even apart from the centralizing policies then being promoted, the city attracted much economic and commercial interest, and, to give just one example, Abū Saʿīd al-Abzārī praised its market specialising in Oriental spices, inviting his brother to transfer his activities there (after 1060).<sup>50</sup> There was, however, no shortage of markedly contrary opinions; Ḥasan b. Khalaf of Baghdad, who had arrived in Palermo in the middle of the century, defined it as “a land with nothing at all.”<sup>51</sup> Palermo was also a haven for North African Jews fleeing Almohad persecution. For example, Ephraym ben Yiṣḥaq, a Maghribi Jew, recounted how the threat of forcible

<sup>45</sup> *JS*, 1: 196; for the dating of the customs see Elena Pezzini, “Articolazioni territoriali a Palermo tra XII e XIV secolo,” *MEFRM* 116, 2 (2004), 729–801: 761–62; for an analysis of the custom 36 see Giuseppe Mandalà, Marcello Moscone, “Tra latini, greci e ‘arabici’: ricerche su scrittura e cultura a Palermo fra XII e XIII secolo,” *Segno e testo. International Journal on Manuscripts and Text Transmission* 7 (2009), 143–238: 189–94.

<sup>46</sup> *JS*, 1: 212, 213, 223, 225, 226.

<sup>47</sup> Straus, *Gli Ebrei di Sicilia*, pp. 62, 107.

<sup>48</sup> Benjamin of Tudela, *Itinerary*, ed. Marcus N. Adler (London, 1907), Hebrew text, p. 70; English translation pp. 78–79; it is an open, and still hotly disputed question as to whether the figure refers to the totality of individuals, to male adults only (a figure therefore to be multiplied by an exponent of 4/6 persons) or to the number of families, see *SC*, p. 33.

<sup>49</sup> *JS*, 1: 174.

<sup>50</sup> *JS*, 1: 138.

<sup>51</sup> *JS*, 1: 177.

conversion had driven him from Ceuta, and how, having lived in Palermo for fifteen years, he was a witness to a sack, lost all his goods, and therefore set out in the direction of Egypt.<sup>52</sup>

In the Swabian period the mobility of the Palermitan Jewish community was underlined by the cession of the income of the Jews of Palermo in 1211, and the text refers to “all the Jews from our city of Palermo, both who reside in the aforesaid city and those who may happen to be living there.”<sup>53</sup>

It was once again from northern Africa under the political control of the Almohad caliphate, or rather from the Garbo (Lat. *Garbum*), that a group of Jews in flight from Almohad persecutions reached Palermo and Sicily;<sup>54</sup> the migration should be seen in the context of the intense economic, political and diplomatic relations linking the Swabian kingdom to the Arab-Islamic powers in the Maghrib.

The presence in Palermo of the Jews from the Garbo is known to us through two documents from the Swabian Chancellery addressed to the *secretus* of Palermo, Obert Fallamonaca:<sup>55</sup> a *mandatum* of 28 November 1239 which documents their arrival in the city shortly before, and a *responsalis* of 15 December 1239, the foundation charter of the community of those who had newly arrived; this latter testifies to a dialectic between the Jews' requests, the arrangements made by the *secretus* of Palermo, and the will of Frederick II.<sup>56</sup>

The settlement of the Jews from the Garbo did not only involve the capital but also other places on the island,<sup>57</sup> among them Mazara<sup>58</sup> and

<sup>52</sup> *JS*, 1: 189; the letter has been dated to 1181 but we cannot rule out the possibility of this dating being revised.

<sup>53</sup> *Omnes Iudeos civitatis nostre Panormi tam illos qui in ipsa civitate morantur quam et alios quos de cetero in ipsa civitate contingerit habitare*, *JS*, 1: 206.

<sup>54</sup> Giuseppe Mandalà, “La migration des juifs du *Garbum* en Sicile (1239),” in Benoît Grévin, ed., *Maghreb-Italie. Des passeurs médiévaux à l’Orientalisme moderne (XIII<sup>e</sup>–milieu XX<sup>e</sup> siècle)* (Rome, 2010), pp. 19–48. The Jews of the Garbo did not come from the island of Gerba, as modern historiography continues quite mistakenly to repeat, most recently, *SC*, pp. 40, 42.

<sup>55</sup> Obert Fallamonaca was a prominent figure in the Swabian administration, probably of Arab-Christian origin, see Jeremy Johns, *Arabic Administration in Norman Sicily. The Royal Dīwān* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 245–47.

<sup>56</sup> *RF*, 1: n. 228, pp. 219–20; n. 261, pp. 263–67.

<sup>57</sup> *RF*, 1: p. 265.

<sup>58</sup> *ACFUP 1. Registri di lettere, gabelle e petizioni 1274–1321*, ed. Fedele Pollaci Nuccio and Domenico Gnoffo, republished and introduced by Francesco Giunta (Palermo, 1982), pp. 347–48; *JS*, 1: 231.

perhaps Cefalù.<sup>59</sup> In Palermo the requests submitted by the new arrivals implied a stable and lasting settlement, a presence rooted in the urban fabric and in the agricultural specializations in crisis following the departure of the Muslims. Fallamonaca communicated the requests of the Jews of the Garbo, who, first of all, *nec concordant cum aliis Iudeis Panormi*; they therefore asked if they might build a synagogue *de novo*, expressed a wish to occupy *casalina* to be used as dwellings within the old Cassaro; they also asked for an elder (*senex*, that is, a *shaykh*) serving as a *magister* to be appointed, and permission to cultivate the *palmeretum vel dactiletum*, a site near to the Favara, according to the custom of the Garbo, proposing to give the Curia one half of what was produced and to keep the other half for themselves.

The emperor Frederick instructed Obert to single out *fidelem nobis et utilem ipsis*, and to designate him *magister*; he took note of the rift between the Jews of the Garbo and their co-religionists but forbade the occupation of *casalina* within the old Cassaro, granting another site better suited to being a residential area. In compliance with canon law the emperor also denied the Jews from the Garbo the right to build a synagogue *ex novo*, but agreed to the use and overhaul of a disused synagogue if one could be found. Finally, the Jews of the Garbo were given permission to cultivate palm trees using their own methods and entrusted by Frederick with the date-grove for the duration of five or ten years,<sup>60</sup> according to the conditions laid down by the abovementioned Obert in his previous missive.

The *responsalis* gave the emperor's replies to the *capitula* sent by the *secretus* Fallamonaca; the latter would have liked to attract to Palermo other Jews who had come from the Garbo and who had already settled in various parts of Sicily, but the emperor declared himself to be opposed, inasmuch as it might discourage those who were on the point of setting out for the Kingdom. Frederick charged Obert with collecting the taxes levied upon the Jews resident in Palermo, and settled upon the annual sum: *gisìa* of 400 *tari*; a tax on wine of 150 *tari*; 50 *tari* on the slaughtering

<sup>59</sup> *Rollus rubeus. Privilegia Ecclesiae Cephaleditanae a diversis regibus et imperatoribus concessa, recollecta et in hoc volumen scripta*, ed. Corrado Mirto (Palermo 1972), pp. 40–41.

<sup>60</sup> On the subsequent history of the date-grove of the Favara, transferred to the Teutonic Knights of the Magione and given in emphyteusis from 1255 on, and finally destroyed by the Angevins in 1316, see Salvatore Cusa, *La palma nella poesia, nella scienza e nella storia siciliana* (Palermo, 1873), pp. 47–53; Illuminato Peri, "Censuazioni in Sicilia nel secolo XIII," *Economia e Storia* IV, 1 (1957), 41–58: 53–54.

of animals; if a demographic increase should occur, the relevant taxes would likewise be increased.

From the *responsalis* we may also infer that Obert had already granted, on his own initiative, plots in the district of the Favara, and had informed the emperor of the measure in the *capitula*; Frederick took note of Obert's decision, emphasised that the lands of the demesne were not suited to this purpose, and arranged for the cultivation of henna, indigo *et alia diversa semina que crescunt in Garbo, nec sunt in partibus Sicilie adhuc visa crescere*; finally, the emperor ratified the separation between the Jews of the Garbo (*iudei extranei*) and the Jews of Palermo (*iudei Panormi*) suggested by Obert, and left it up to him to choose their place of residence and to appoint a *magister*.

In the mid-13th century Palermo was largely deserted, on account of the departure of the Muslims, and evidently Obert sought to fill the biological void that had been created in the capital, using for this purpose the Jews of the Garbo.<sup>61</sup> The *littera* also addressed various questions, almost all of them linked to the relaunching of agriculture in the territory of Palermo; the emperor issued instructions designed to foster an economic revival, such as the cutting of the cane-brake of Misilmeri, the entrusting to *novi habitatores* of demesne lands next to the Zisa, the seeking out of men in the Orient who were acquainted with sugar cane cultivation,<sup>62</sup> and of *victualia* to export.<sup>63</sup> The Jews of the Garbo were entrusted with the task of relaunching crops planted earlier that were now in a critical state, such as date palms,<sup>64</sup> henna and indigo,<sup>65</sup> but also with testing out new crops.

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<sup>61</sup> On Swabian Palermo, see Illuminato Peri, "Il porto di Palermo dagli Arabi agli Aragonesi," *Economia e Storia* V, 4 (1958), 422–69, Carmelo Trasselli, "Sulla popolazione di Palermo nei secoli XIII–XIV," *Economia e Storia* XI, 3 (1964), 329–44, Salvatore Fodale, "Palermo «sedes Regni» e città di Federico II," in *Federico e le città italiane*, ed. Pierre Toubert, Agostino Paravicini Bagliani (Palermo, 1994), pp. 212–318; Carmela Angela Di Stefano, "Palermo nella prima metà del XIII secolo: l'evidenza archeologica," in *Federico e la Sicilia: dalla terra alla corona. Archeologia e architettura*, ed. Carmela Angela Di Stefano and Antonio Cadei, 2 vols. (Siracusa, 2000), 1: pp. 289–92.

<sup>62</sup> *RF*, 1: pp. 264–67.

<sup>63</sup> The term *victualia* has a broad meaning and refers both to wheat (*frumentum*) but also to other kinds of sustenance (amongst them barley, beans and legumes in general), see *RF*, 1: pp. 24–25.

<sup>64</sup> The interest in the date-grove would seem to have been a priority, and already in the *mandatum* of November 1239 it was emphasised that the Jews of the Garbo *volunt facere dactulitum nostrum Panormi fructificare, cum exinde sint instructi*, *RF*, 1: p. 220.

<sup>65</sup> Frederick tended to entrust dyeing and *celandra* (dressing preparatory to dyeing) to the Jews, establishing a sort of Jewish monopoly in this sector. The cultivation by the Jews of the Garbo of plants such as indigo and henna, intended to supply the raw materials for the dyeing process, may be considered as an integral part of the productive cycle. As

The arrival in Palermo of the Jews of the Garbo represents an event of real demographic importance, and from a strictly numerical point of view they may perhaps account for at least 1/3 of the whole Palermitan Jewish population. Indeed, we know that the *gisia* paid by the Jews of the Garbo in 1239 was equivalent to 400 *tari*: calculating the population on the basis of the *gisia* paid by Jews and Muslims in Malta and Gozo around 1245 (3 *tari* and 11 *grana*),<sup>66</sup> the families would number 112, and the individuals between 448 and 672 (a calculation based upon there being 4/6 individuals per family);<sup>67</sup> the figure corresponds, highly approximate though it may be and making all due allowances, to 1/3 of the Palermitan Jews mentioned by Benjamin of Tudela in 1173. Not the least important point to note is that the Jews of the Garbo, coming from a North African Islamic society, had transmitted—in a period of profound upheaval—a significant cultural and linguistic Judeo-Arabic contribution to Jewish life on the island.

In 1270 Charles of Anjou referred to two distinct Jewish communities present in Palermo (*scriptum est universis Iudeis Panormi et Garbi*) and ratified the election of a single personage to the office of cantor/*hazzan* (*presbiteratus in synagogas vestras*),<sup>68</sup> to the duty of ritual slaughter and to the notaryship: *Maborach Faddalckassem iudeum habitatorem Panormi fidelem nostrum*, obviously one of the new arrivals, examined with this end in mind by *magistrum Ferrag, fidelem nostrum et interpretem curie nostre*, probably the famous translator Faraj b. Sālīm of Agrigento.<sup>69</sup> At the distance of almost a century, in the early Aragonese period, integration had

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regards relations between Jews and the dyeing (and silk) industry, see Straus, *Gli Ebrei di Sicilia*, pp. 68–73.

<sup>66</sup> For the document from Malta and Gozo, *JS*, 1: 221; for a close analysis, Anthony Luttrell, “Giliberto Abbate’s Report on Malta: circa 1241,” in Keith Sciberras, ed., *Proceedings of History Week 1993, for the Malta Historical Society* (Malta 1997), pp. 1–29.

<sup>67</sup> Clearly the *gisia* mentioned in the *responsalis* can refer only to the Jews of the Garbo (*Super eos in super quod eodem tua capitula continebant te statuisse recipi a Iudei*), and not to the entire Jewish presence in Palermo, contrary to what is asserted by Illuminato Peri, *Uomini, città e campagne in Sicilia dall’XI al XIII secolo* (Roma-Bari 1990), p. 115; and in *AE*, pp. 99, 101 table 3.

<sup>68</sup> *Praesbiterum Iudeorum, qui hebraice dicitur hasem, ad cuius officium pertinet canere officia in sinagogis etiam conficere contractus, et scribere instrumenta hebraice secundum ritum eorum* (Mazara 1325), Alberto Rizzo Marino, “Gli ebrei di Mazara nei secoli Quattordicesimo e Quindicesimo,” *Atti della Società trapanese per la Storia Patria* (1971), 3–78: 43.

<sup>69</sup> *JS*, I, 232; at the behest of Charles I of Anjou, Faraj translated from Arabic into Latin *al-Hāwī* (*Liber continens*) of al-Rāzī, in 1279, and the *Taqwīm al-abdān* (*Tacuynus de febribus*) of Ibn Jazla in 1281, see Amari, *Storia*, 3: pp. 717–18; Moritz Steinschneider, *Die hebräischen Übersetzungen des Mittelalters und die Juden als Dolmetscher* (Berlin, 1893), pp. 974–75.

not yet occurred; the two groups both lived within the city centre and paid their taxes collectively,<sup>70</sup> but were still formally distinct and separated into citizens and foreigners: in 1325 the *universitas Iudeorum tam videlicet civium quam exterorum qui de Garbo* paid a *gisia* of 1200 *tari* and a wine tax of 400 *tari*, figures guaranteed to the *miles* Guido Filangeri and to his heirs by Frederick III.<sup>71</sup>

#### FROM THE VESPERS TO THE EXPULSION (1282–1492–93)

The revolt of the Vespers (30 March 1282) sundered the island in a geopolitical sense from the mainland, and constituted an epochal shift thrusting the Sicilian Jewish communities into the orbit of the Crown of Aragon. The landing of Peter III of Aragon and the war with the Angevins culminated in the peace of Caltabellotta (1302) and in the creation of the *regnum Trinacriae* founded by Frederick III (ruled 1291–1337). In the second half of the 14th century the war with the Angevins, the weakness of the Aragonese sovereigns and the royal power's estrangement from the city made possible the urban *signoria* of the Chiaromonte. In 1390 Martin the Younger claimed possession of Sicily by virtue of his marriage with Maria, daughter of Frederick the Simple, and in 1392 Catalan troops commanded by Bernardo de Cabrera disembarked in the island; the Catalans managed to rid themselves of the coalition of Sicilian barons, and in 1397 wrested Palermo once and for all from the *signoria* of the Chiaromonte. From this date up until 1409 the island was ruled by Martin the Younger, and then by Martin the Elder (1409–1410). Following on from the accord of Caspe (1412), Sicily was assigned to Ferdinand of Castile (1412–16) and became a Vice-Kingdom. With Alfonso V the Magnanimous (1416–58) and the *Amprisa* of Naples (1443), the island was joined up again with the mainland under the standard of the crown of Aragon; from these latter it passed to John I and Ferdinand II and, after the union with Isabella of

<sup>70</sup> The figures involved would amount to 40 ounces and to 400 families according to the calculations given in *AE*, p. 101 table 3.

<sup>71</sup> *Codice diplomatico dei giudei di Sicilia*, ed. Bartolomeo and Giuseppe Lagumina, 3 vols. (Palermo, 1884–1909), 1: n. 36; *ACFUP*, 2. *Fisco e società nella Sicilia aragonese. Le pandette delle gabelle regie del XIV secolo*, ed. Rosa Maria Dentici Buccellato (Palermo, 1983), p. 75, n. 108. On the Filangeri, judges and praetors of Palermo between 1301 and 1337, see Antonio Flandina, *Il codice Filangeri e il codice Speciale. Privilegi inediti della città di Palermo* (Palermo, 1891), p. 5, n. 1.

Castile (1479), the fortunes of the Jews of Sicily followed those of the two unified crowns up until the expulsion of 1492–93.

*Juridical and Fiscal Status*

Up until the expulsion the Jews of Sicily would be *servi regiae camerae*, a status which expressed a direct, and in some respects privileged relationship with the Crown; such a designation was only used in royal documentation, whereas the notaries defined the Jews in a different fashion and in relation to the statutes and privileges of the lands of which they were *habitatores*, or of the cities of which they were citizens, or *cives*. Like the Christian citizens, the Jewish *cives* enjoyed the right to hold property, availed themselves of various benefits and were subject to fiscal levies connected to the city. The Jews retained their status and fiscal privileges and this even when they emigrated, thereby causing problems both for the city they had left, which thereby lost its tax-payers, and for the land where they settled, and where they did not pay taxes.<sup>72</sup>

Inasmuch as they were *servi regiae camerae*, jurisdiction respecting the Jews was the concern of the State; yet already before the Angevin period, indeed, in the Swabian period, the Sicilian Church recovered jurisdiction over the Jews of Palermo. In 1331 Peter II instituted an enquiry, and confirmed the Palermitan Church's jurisdiction over the Jews granted by Frederick II in 1210–1224;<sup>73</sup> in 1340, in response to a petition from the Jews of Palermo, he revoked the preceding arrangement;<sup>74</sup> subsequently the ban on the archbishop and on his vicars was confirmed, in 1348, by king Louis,<sup>75</sup> and in 1392 by Martin, who entrusted it to the *dienchelele* (Hebrew: *dayyan kelali*, "supreme judge").<sup>76</sup>

In the 14th century Martin or Alfonso did not hesitate to assign jurisdiction over the Jews of Palermo to eminent personages or high-ranking officials: Gonzalvo de Ayçoça in 1396, and then the master *secretus* Gispert de Isfar;<sup>77</sup> it was a matter of allowing the holders of certain offices or the members of the Curia to profit from fines, confiscations and income arising from the exercise of justice; a new post was created, that of governor of

<sup>72</sup> *AE*, pp. 98–99; Henri Bresc, "Gli ebrei siciliani e la politica nel Medioevo," *Siculorum Gymnasium* n.s. LVI, 2 (2003), 263–84: 270–73.

<sup>73</sup> *JS*, 2: 399, 438–41.

<sup>74</sup> *JS*, 2: 545.

<sup>75</sup> *JS*, 2: 598, 599.

<sup>76</sup> *JS*, 3: 1333, 1338.

<sup>77</sup> *JS*, 3: 1465; IV, 2333.



the Jews (*protector Iudeorum*), a protector who certainly had interests of his own, but was not therefore any the less appreciated by the Jews themselves.<sup>78</sup>

The status of *servi regiae camerae* stipulated that the Jews paid taxes to the royal treasury; therefore the constitutions of 1324 explicitly banned a noble, count, baron, knight or burgher from taking a Jew under their protection and hence from collecting a tax.<sup>79</sup> The imposition of a poll tax, the *gisìa*, was a part of the distinctive and symbolic marks of the condition of the Jews; between the 13th century and the 14th century all the Sicilian Jews were obliged to pay the gabelles of the *gisìa* and of the *augustale*; in per capita terms the *gisìa* was not too onerous, being 3 *tari* per house in the 14th century, reduced in the early 15th century to a figure oscillating between 1 *tari* and 10 *grana* and 2 *tari* per house, while the *augustale* corresponded to 7 and a half *tari*. To gauge what such figures might mean, one should bear in mind that 3 *tari* represented three days of work for a skilled artisan, a very small sum for an annual tax, and even with the addition of the *augustale* the amounts involved continued to be modest.<sup>80</sup>

The *gisìa* enables us to follow the demographic evolution and fiscal capacity of the main Jewish communities. Being a source of secure income, the *gisìa* was alienated early on by the monarchy, first in favour of knights who were in its service during the war of the Vespers (de Calvellis, Filangeri, Romano), then in favour of functionaries (Sala). After 1392 the *gisìa* was used to reward the loyalty of the supreme judge Abenafia and of some judges or secretaries at court (Barbera, Bonsignore, De Gregorio). Finally, in 1430 the income was ceded to members of the local petty nobility and to creditors of the court (Bandi, De Bartholomeo, Militano, Morano).<sup>81</sup>

The more onerous aspects of taxation had to do with indirect taxes: the gabelles on trade and consumption, a sphere in which perfect equality between Jews and Christians prevailed. In 1312 Frederick III ratified the following taxes paid by the Jews of Palermo: the *cabella buchirie sive scanature*, *qui dicebatur dohana carniun*, a tax on the Christian and Jewish butchers of Palermo, entrusted to the tax-collectors; the *cabella platee someriorum*, a tax on the selling of houses, whereby, if purchaser and

<sup>78</sup> Bresc, "Gli ebrei," p. 271.

<sup>79</sup> JS, 2: 324.

<sup>80</sup> AE, p. 100.

<sup>81</sup> AE, pp. 109–100.

seller were Jews, they would pay 3%; if one of the two were Christian the Jew had to pay 4% of the purchase price; the *cabella iocularie*, an oscillating tax on the music played at Jewish weddings *secundum ritum Sarcenorum*, abolished in 1393,<sup>82</sup> the minimal payment for which was 4 *tari*. On the birth of a male child Jews paid 1 *tari*, but for a girl child 10 *grana*; the *cabella fumi*, to be paid for every butchered animal, that is, for a ram 1 *granum*; for two goats 1 *granum*; for each ox or cow 5 *grana*.<sup>83</sup>

In the 15th century, along with the ordinary taxes, there was the burden of the royal collections paid in return for pardons or privileges granted by the monarchy or conceded upon extraordinary occasions. Fiscal pressure mounted during the *Amprisa* of Alfonso and during the Catalan revolution, when the need for armaments intensified taxation, but the reestablishment of royal authority and peace brought the fiscal burden back down to tolerable levels.<sup>84</sup> The levying of the taxes was delegated to the wealthier Jews who assumed overall responsibility but had recourse to functionaries and clerks for the actual collection of the contributions owed. The collection paid by the Jews was calculated according to their movable wealth and was a little more onerous for them than it was for the Christians.<sup>85</sup>

In the 14th century personal services offered by Jews began to appear, a tangible sign of the servitude of the *regia camera*; these were *angarias* or *perangarias* linked to the real or symbolic presence of the sovereign: the cleaning of his residence, castle or palace; the providing of accommodation for officials (the *posata*), the supplying of lodgings, and so on.<sup>86</sup> Such personal services were never questioned but were considered just and the exclusive preserve of the prince and his representatives. One important aspect was the providing of the banners, with the royal coat of arms and colours, which indicated the direct link between Jews and state power; more particularly, the Jews of Palermo were obliged to provide the banners for the royal galleys.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>82</sup> *JS*, 3: 1373.

<sup>83</sup> *JS*, 2: 342.

<sup>84</sup> Besc, "Gli ebrei," p. 272.

<sup>85</sup> *AE*, pp. 104–108.

<sup>86</sup> *AE*, pp. 96–98; Besc, "Gli ebrei," pp. 272–73; see for example a document from 1321, *JS*, 2: 348.

<sup>87</sup> *JS*, 2: 586; 3: 1336.

*The Jewish Community*

Already from the Swabian period the figure of the *magister Iudeorum*, a *shaykh* or elder, heir to the *nagid* or to the *ra'īs al-yahūd* of the Geniza society, began to emerge, and to him was entrusted the management of the community's domestic affairs and of its relations with the royal power. Between 1285 and 1325 we are witness to the consolidation in Sicily of an elective and annual magistracy modelled upon municipal institutions; the holders of this post were called *prothi*.<sup>88</sup> It was not long before the two offices came into conflict, and, in Palermo, a distinction regarding their respective competences was proposed: the office of *magister Iudeorum*, which corresponded to that of *sichus/shaykh*,<sup>89</sup> would be responsible for handling "spiritual affairs;"<sup>90</sup> conversely, the *prothus Iudeorum* was entrusted with the task of administering the *temporalia* of the Jewish community.<sup>91</sup>

Thus, to take just one example, on 12 April 1283 King Peter informed all the Jews of Palermo that he had appointed David Lu Medicu *magister Iudeorum Panormi*, relieving of the post any other personage who had been deputed to such an office.<sup>92</sup> David would seem to have performed the role of *magister Iudeorum Panormi* uninterruptedly from 1283 to 1292 but during the two year span of 1292–93 he was involved in a specious *contencio seu controversia*<sup>93</sup> with Sabahon, son of Iuzeff, of Centuripe, who, having been appointed *sichus* and *prothus* of all the Jews of the city of Palermo, should have substituted for him in his office. The Aragonese sovereign James II tried in vain to combine the two offices and to entrust them to a single person in his confidence, Sabahon; after various vicissitudes, and a fierce factional struggle, David succeeded in having the two offices separated and allotted to two different persons.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>88</sup> *AE*, pp. 249–50.

<sup>89</sup> *JS*, 1: 27; even if one cannot rule out a unifying of two originally distinct offices, as the documentation would seem to suggest: *sichorie et magistratus officium*, *JS*, 1: 272; *magister et sichus*, *JS*, 1: 273; Mandalà, "Aḥiṭuv," p. 45.

<sup>90</sup> *JS*, 1, 270; *ad spiritualia Iudeorum, videlicet sichoria*, *JS*, 1, p. 273; Mandalà, "Aḥiṭuv," p. 45.

<sup>91</sup> *In Prothum Iudeorum dicte civitatis circa temporalia remanente*, *JS*, 1, 271; *et alterum ad temporalia, videlicet prothoria*, *JS*, 1, 273; Mandalà, "Aḥiṭuv," p. 45.

<sup>92</sup> *JS*, 1, 252; Mandalà, "Aḥiṭuv," pp. 44–46.

<sup>93</sup> *JS*, 1, 273; Mandalà, "Aḥiṭuv," pp. 44–46.

<sup>94</sup> *Sabahoni Iuzeffi de Centorbio iudeo civi Panormi fideli suo*, *JS*, 1: 269; Mandalà, "Aḥiṭuv," pp. 44–46.

In the course of the 14th century the position of *prothus* remained ill-defined, liable to changes in both name and function, and, when we consider the island as a whole we find that various different models were in contention. Thus, in Palermo itself the running of the community was entrusted to a council ruled by three *prothi*, who administered the patrimony of the synagogue, were responsible for any dealings with the King, and ran the independent tribunal, civil and criminal.<sup>95</sup> At the end of the 14th century there was an evolution, favoured by the monarchy, towards the exclusive model of the council, with two or three *prothi* and twelve elected councillors. The regime of the Twelve spread out from Palermo, and was regulated by Martin in 1397 on the basis of the census: 4 Jews *de statu majori*, 4 *de statu mediocre*, 4 *de statu minori*, elected each year, succeeded one another in rotation in threes every three months, according to a cycle which guaranteed honesty and surveillance; the Twelve in their turn had every four months to choose three *prothi* responsible for ensuring that the system ran smoothly.<sup>96</sup>

In 1421 the statutes requested by all the Jewish communities in the Kingdom provided for this regime to be extended everywhere.<sup>97</sup> There was then created a general system of the Jewish communities of the Kingdom: annual elections, government by council, multiplication of the *prothi*. The King had a hand in the creation of this common law, imposing it on the Jews. The monarchy thus followed a pronounced tendency to unify, to simplify and to create the representative institutions it needed in order to guarantee dialogue and consensus, as well as the convenient and prompt collection of taxes.<sup>98</sup> Annual appointments were also stipulated for all the other religious offices of an administrative kind, such as spiritual judges and major or minor sacristans. The system, though characterised by a spirit of democracy and participation in appointments, only partly succeeded in reducing conflict and dissension, which did in fact persist, as was demonstrated by the protests and tensions over meddling and interference between the various offices; we find a control over the community's posts on the part of a clearly defined group of families in whose hands all the major appointments (*prothi*, notables, spiritual judges and major sacristans) were concentrated, an oligarchy at times ill-supported by the rest of the Jewish population. Exemptions from taxes, particular

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<sup>95</sup> Besc, "Gli ebrei," p. 274.

<sup>96</sup> *JS*, 3: 1505; *AE*, pp. 251–253; Besc, "Gli ebrei," p. 274.

<sup>97</sup> *JS*, 4: 2078.

<sup>98</sup> Besc, "Gli ebrei," p. 274.

forms of reverence and homage paid at family celebrations, such as marriages and funerals, precipitating protests and conflicts, testified to this supremacy and this control.<sup>99</sup>

The main family groups tended to use the royal power to boost their own influence over the community, becoming at times a disruptive influence. Alliances between the major Jewish families and the royal power were based upon strongly defined political and economic interests; they enabled the Jewish community to reinforce the application of the Mosaic law but gave rise to intense jealousies and internal clashes, thereby weakening its capacity to resist the central power.

A radical turning-point came with the royal founding of the office of supreme judge or *dayyan kelali*; as in Spain, the ultimate aim was the federation of the communities under the leadership of a *dienchelele*, supreme judge of the communities. For the royal power the appointing of the supreme judge served as a guarantee of discipline and unity, the model here being the Roman Church; for the rabbis it was an opportunity to impose some new ordinances in conformity with the moral conception, at times new, which they had elaborated. According to a common rule, the supreme judges were chosen from amongst those in the prince's inner circle, provoking fierce resistance from the communities, which were strongly attached to their ancient autonomy.<sup>100</sup>

Jewish Sicily entered unwillingly into the era of the court Jews, of the Rabbinate and also of the union of all the Jews into a single community: the first stage in this process was effected by the Catalan dynasty and on the initiative of a foreign Rabbi, a royal physician. The central judgeship was created in 1396 for *magister* Iosep Abenafia, a native of Aragon who had come to the island with the Catalan conquerors and in the guise of royal physician, becoming then supreme judge of all the Jews of the Kingdom according to Jewish law, and assessor alongside the judge and protector of the Jews, Gonzalvo de Ayçoça.<sup>101</sup>

The powers entrusted to Iosep Abenafia were far-reaching indeed: civil and criminal judgements over all cases coming under Mosaic law, the appointing of the judges of the communities and of the officials, councillors and treasurers of the synagogues. In 1405, in Palermo, a group of

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<sup>99</sup> Two emblematic cases of exemptions and privileges granted to Palermo are those of the de Medico family, *JS*, 1: 214, 224, 248; 2: 356, 395; 765; Mandalà, "Aḥiṭuv," pp. 42–53; and to Merdoc Cosentino and to his heirs (1339–40), *JS*, 2: 530, 544, 600; 3: 1671, 1673.

<sup>100</sup> *AE*, pp. 271–279; Bresc, "Gli ebrei," pp. 277–79.

<sup>101</sup> *JS*, 3: 1402; 1463.

objectors prevented the judges appointed by master Abenafia from performing their official functions. Two parties formed: aligned with the supreme judge were the learned, physicians and rabbis alike as well as the more prestigious families, the nobility of knowledge and of wealth, while on the other side were massed the Jews of unknown kindred.<sup>102</sup> In 1408, upon the death of Abenafia, the King abolished the post of *dienchelele*; in 1420 the office was re-established and assigned to a man from Messina, Moyses de la Bonavoglia, the personal physician of Alfonso V, descended from an illustrious family of physicians, a decision which gave rise to squabbles and bitter tensions;<sup>103</sup> in 1446 the King entrusted the supreme judgeship to Iosue Bennacrimi of Randazzo, likewise a royal physician,<sup>104</sup> but in 1447 the ambassadors from the Jewish community won the right, on payment of 600 ounces, to redeem and abolish the office.<sup>105</sup>

After the end of the hegemony of the supreme judges, Palermo appears to have predominated, and there would seem to have been an embryonic federal representation. The preponderance of the Jews of the capital had long been established, and in 1393 the council of the Palermitan community had won recognition for its appeal jurisdiction for all Jews in the Kingdom in matrimonial matters, the city being *corona caput et melior omnibus aliis civitatibus dicti regni*, its Jewish community (*universitas Iudeorum*) should by the same token be considered to be *caput et melior omnibus aliis aliamentis predicti regni*.<sup>106</sup> In 1469 the Viceroy López Ximen de Urrea convoked one or two representatives from each of the great Jewish communities in the royal demesne; those of the queen's demesne (*camera reginalis*) or of the great baronies paid separately: eighteen communities delegated Palermo.<sup>107</sup> The consequence of the meeting of a parliament of the Jews of the demesne, and the establishment of a permanent representative body with a fiscal function is similar to the general deputations of Catalonia and Sicily with which the Crown was accustomed to deal, and which could avail themselves of far-reaching powers to collect the sums levied.

In 1489 a convocation showed how Sicilian Jewry had assimilated the system of representation and deputation: the communities were invited

<sup>102</sup> JS, 3: 1726; Bresc, "Gli ebrei," p. 278.

<sup>103</sup> JS, 4: 2052, 2056, 2077, 2082.

<sup>104</sup> JS, 5: 2815–2816.

<sup>105</sup> JS, 5: 2850, 2860.

<sup>106</sup> JS, 3: 1370; Bresc, "Gli ebrei," p. 280.

<sup>107</sup> JS, 6: 3819; Bresc, "Gli ebrei," p. 280.

to send one or two delegates to Palermo, and the small communities were authorised to delegate their representatives to the ambassadors of the nearest larger community; the Jews of Palermo, being divided into factions, decided to have themselves be represented by six ambassadors, but the Viceroy allowed them just a single voice.<sup>108</sup> In 1489, when it was a matter of paying the donative of 1000 ounces for the Granada venture, the decision was taken to form a deputation composed of Abram Xifuni of Palermo, Samuel Xifuni of Agrigento, Rabba e Leo Xirusu of Syracuse, Moyses de la Bonavoglia of Messina, Iacob Greco of Catania and Paternò, Geremia Cuynu of Trapani, all nominated by the general council of the Jews.<sup>109</sup> A single voice, then, to each community irrespective of its demographic weight: the capital's community was losing its hegemony over the others.<sup>110</sup>

### *Productive Activities and the Economy*

The Jewish mercantile economy was founded upon a sense of communal belonging, competition between families and the exchange of rare and precious products. The Jewish population of Palermo was fully involved in all the spheres and productive activities that the Sicilian economy of the early 15th century offered, often in mixed ventures with both Jews and Christians in them. The Jewish presence was especially prominent in the sugarcane industry, a specialisation lost at the beginning of the 15th century to the nobility and the big foreign merchants; in the tunny-fish nets and in the landed estates, whose products, whether in agriculture or in stock-breeding, were exchanged for imported textiles. The ownership of vines and involvement in the wine trade, activities consistent with the dictates of the Jewish religion, was also important.<sup>111</sup>

The enquiry conducted by Iacob Xarchi in 1451 brought to light three main professions, namely, those of notary, physician and intermediary (*medianus*).<sup>112</sup> A Jewish presence was evident in activities or in workshops that were passed down from father to son, a professional stance widely

<sup>108</sup> *JS*, 7: 5177, 5185; Bresc, "Gli ebrei," p. 281.

<sup>109</sup> *JS*, 7: 5196; Bresc, "Gli ebrei," p. 280.

<sup>110</sup> Bresc, "Gli ebrei," p. 281.

<sup>111</sup> For the economic activities of Sicilian Jews between the 14th and 15th centuries, see *AE*, pp. 187–243; *SC*, pp. 393–470.

<sup>112</sup> *JS*, 5: 2961; in particular, as regards the *notarius Iudeorum* see Mariuccia Bevilacqua Krasner, "Il *notarius Iudeorum* nella comunità ebraica di Palermo nel XV secolo," *Sefer Yuhasin* 20 (2004), 19–37.

recognised in 15th-century Palermo; the Jews specialised in the working of silk and leather, and in the dyer's art, but they also shone as goldsmiths and blacksmiths; their skills in working coral and in creating fountains were also much appreciated.<sup>113</sup>

*Relations with the Other Communities*

The Crown of Aragon, save for brief periods, always opted for maintaining in the island the ancient state of tolerance and for safeguarding the ancient ordinances, despite the reference to canon law made by certain popes and the intensification of anti-Jewish preaching, not least by Franciscan spirituals and reformed Dominicans.<sup>114</sup>

An important exception were the constitutions of Frederick III, who, under the influence of Arnold of Villanova, enacted in 1310 a programme of conversion and segregation of the religious minorities.<sup>115</sup> In particular, the sovereign ensured that those who were newly baptised could not be apostrophised as "renegade dogs" by their former co-religionists; he condemned the ownership of Christian slaves and prohibited Jews from testifying against Christians, and likewise every form of promiscuity. The Jews were debarred from holding any public office, and could not practise medicine on Christians. Not the least of such measures was the imposition upon Saracens, but apparently not upon Jews, of a badge. So far as the Jews were concerned, the obligation to wear a badge upon their clothes, a circle of red cloth, was imposed in 1366 by Frederick IV of Aragon, who entrusted Nicolò Papalla, Friar Minor and Royal Chaplain, with the task of overseeing the implementation of this measure.<sup>116</sup> In 1393 the Martins ratified the ancient custom imposed upon the Jews of wearing the *signum seu rodam amplitudinis unius carleni* upon their upper garments, but recommended that this not be enforced too zealously.<sup>117</sup>

There is evidence in the documentary record for occasional anti-Jewish riots, in the main linked to events in the Iberian peninsula or to the ritual violence which tended to explode during Christian religious festivals,

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<sup>113</sup> *AE*, pp. 197–201; Patrizia Sardina, *Palermo e i Chiaromonte: splendore e tramonto di una signoria. Potere nobiliare, ceti dirigenti e società tra XIV e XV secolo* (Caltanissetta-Rome, 2003), p. 422.

<sup>114</sup> Mariuccia Bevilacqua Krasner, "Re, regine, francescani, domenicani ed ebrei in Sicilia nel XIV e XV secolo. Potere politico, potere religioso e comunità ebraiche in Sicilia," *Archivio storico siciliano* s. IV, 24 (1998), 61–91; Sardina, *Palermo*, pp. 402–404.

<sup>115</sup> *JS*, 2: 339.

<sup>116</sup> *JS*, 2: 879.

<sup>117</sup> *JS*, 3: 1371, 1457, 1507, 1671.



especially on Good Friday or at moments of crisis caused by famines, epidemics and invasions. In Palermo we thus find traces of looting and serious violence against Jews on the eve of Easter 1339,<sup>118</sup> or on the occasion of the popular uprising of 1348.<sup>119</sup>

### *Demography and Expulsion*

We have some estimates as to the demographic density of the Palermitan Jewish population in the second half of the 15th century: in 1452 800 families were counted,<sup>120</sup> whereas in 1487 'Ovadya of Bertinoro mentions some 850 of them, a figure which corresponds to around 5000 persons if we posit six members to each family.<sup>121</sup> These latter figures are higher than was the case at the census of 1479, which had listed 523 taxable hearths, that is, 2600–3000 individuals, but it is likely that on this occasion some families had not been registered for fiscal purposes;<sup>122</sup> the number of 5000 individuals is confirmed by the official deeds of the Kingdom which, in a memorial dated 20 June 1492 describe the serious damage it would suffer from the "partendosi ad uno tracto di la sua cita di Palermo chinqui milia persuni."<sup>123</sup> All in all, in the second half of the 15th century the Jews of Palermo would seem to have accounted for 1/5 of the city's population, which then had around 25,000 inhabitants.

The edict of expulsion was issued in Granada on 31 March 1492, but it was known in Palermo only on 23 May and was promulgated on 1 June 1492. After postponements, objections and stiff opposition on the part of the Viceroy and the upper echelons of Sicilian society, 12 January 1493 was chosen as the final date for the Jews' departure from the island.<sup>124</sup>

<sup>118</sup> JS, 2: 531.

<sup>119</sup> JS, 3: 599.

<sup>120</sup> JS, 5: 3003.

<sup>121</sup> Hebrew text: *From Italy to Jerusalem. The Letters of Rabbi Obadiah of Bertinoro from the Land of Israel. A Critical Edition with Introduction and Notes*, ed. Menachem E. Artom, Abraham David (Ramat Gan, 1997), pp. 37–47: 37; Italian translation: Bartolomeo Lagumina, "Le giudaiche di Palermo e di Messina descritte da Obadia da Bertinoro," *Atti della R. Accademia di Scienze, Lettere e Arti di Palermo* s. III, IV (1897), 13–22: 13.

<sup>122</sup> JS, 7: 4477.

<sup>123</sup> JS, 8: 5497.

<sup>124</sup> JS, 8: 5440; 5447; 5460; 5462; 5868; Francesco Renda, *La fine del giudaismo in Sicilia* (Palermo, 1993); SC, pp. 504–558.

## JEWISH CULTURAL LIFE

The information we have regarding the cultural life of the Jews in Palermo is episodic and lacking in detail. What we do possess has either not been carefully sifted or else is invalidated by a degree of prejudice based upon a failure to comprehend otherness which dates back to 'Ovadya of Bertinoro's letter and persists to the present day.<sup>125</sup>

*The Languages*

Ever since the Islamic period the Jews of Sicily had employed Hebrew and Arabic (Middle Arabic), the latter spoken and written in Hebrew characters, the so-called Judeo-Arabic. The linguistic situation of the Sicilian Jews can be described in terms of diglossia, that is, a functional differentiation between two languages: Hebrew (and Aramaic) was used in the aulic and official register of the liturgy and of literature, Judeo-Arabic in the context of the community and everyday life within the Jewish Arabophone world. From the 12th–13th century there is evidence in the documentary record of contacts with the languages in use in the surrounding milieu, namely, Latin and the Romance languages; we are concerned here with an everyday practice and with erudition firmly rooted in Jewish society on the island. In the course of the 14th and 15th centuries the Sicilian dialect also became part of the lexicon of insular Judeo-Arabic, creating a peculiar language.<sup>126</sup>

The multilingualism of the Sicilian Jews and the preservation of Arabic are magnificently described by Avraham ben Shemu'el Abulafia (1240–c. 1292): “But the most marvellous thing is what occurred among the Jews of the whole island of Sicily: they not only speak Romance and Greek, that is, the languages of the Latins and of the Greeks alongside whom they live, but have also retained the use of the Arabic language

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<sup>125</sup> For a synthesis, albeit a somewhat provisional and reductive one, of Sicilian Jewish culture, see *SC*, pp. 71–76, 369–72.

<sup>126</sup> Antonino Giuffrida, Benedetto Rocco, “Documenti giudeo-arabi nel sec. XV a Palermo,” *Studi magrebini* VIII (1976), 53–110; Benedetto Rocco, “Le tre lingue usate dagli ebrei in Sicilia dal sec. XII al sec. XV,” in *Gli ebrei in Sicilia sino all'espulsione del 1492*, pp. 355–69; Id., “Il giudeo-arabo e il siciliano nei secoli XII–XV: influssi reciproci,” in *Atti del XXI congresso internazionale di linguistica e filologia romanza* (Tübingen, 1998), pp. 539–45; Annliese Nef, “La langue des juifs de Sicile (XII<sup>e</sup>–XV<sup>e</sup> siècles),” in Henri Bresc and Christiane Veauvy, eds., *Mutations d'identités en Méditerranée. Moyen Âge et époque contemporaine* (Paris, 2000), pp. 85–97.

learned in the past, at the time in which the Ishmaelites dwelled [in the island]."<sup>127</sup>

### *Arabization and Islamicization*

The Islamic period can therefore be regarded as a highly formative one for Sicilian Jewish cultural identity; such an identity evolved and was also enhanced diachronically by external contributions. In the late medieval period the Arab inheritance of the Sicilian Jews, the traces of Arabization, can be identified in three points: the use of the Arabic language in speech and in writing; an onomastics in large part faithful to the tradition of the Geniza and at the same time innovatory in its use of new Arabic names; the survival of usages and customs common to the Jewish Arabophone world together with some elements of material culture.<sup>128</sup> Last but not least, this cultural and linguistic inheritance also enabled the Sicilian Jews to take on an important role as cultural mediators between either shore of the Mediterranean, serving not only as ambassadors and interpreters but also as translators from the Arabic, the Hebrew and the Judeo-Arabic.

### *Education*

As regards the educational system, the cornerstone of every Jewish community, there are references to elementary teachers and to private tutors, that is, to a level of instruction capable of guaranteeing an apprenticeship in, and knowledge of, language and texts used in the practice of Judaism.<sup>129</sup> Beyond basic literacy, the documentation indicates a level of higher education necessary to, and useful in the exercise of offices within the community. For example, at the end of the 13th century, David de Medico was judged *sufficienter literatus et bene sufficiens ad ipsum officium exercendum*, with reference to the exercise of the *sichoria*; conversely, his rival Sabahon was considered to be unfitted *propter deffectum literature quem patitur*.<sup>130</sup> Likewise in the course of the 15th century it was specified that the *Capitula*, the community's ordinances presented to the sovereign, should be drafted by Jews who were *sapientes et scientes*.<sup>131</sup> The existence of a higher

<sup>127</sup> Avraham Abulafia, *Ošar 'eden ganuz*, ed. Amnon Gros (Jerusalem, 2000), p. 313; Mandalà, "Aḥiṭuv," p. 60.

<sup>128</sup> *AE*, p. 39.

<sup>129</sup> *SC*, pp. 369–376.

<sup>130</sup> *Dictus autem Sabbaonus propter deffectum literature quem patitur, est ad id procul dubio minus dignus et insufficiens*, *JS*, 1: 273; Mandalà, "Aḥiṭuv," p. 46.

<sup>131</sup> *JS*, 4: 2078.

instruction is documented through the presence of specialised teachers such as Robione de Usueli (probably rabbi Iona de Usuel), *expertus rabi legis mosaice et cerimoniarum Iudaycarum*, who was granted a licence to teach and instruct pupils of every age in any part of Sicily, holding his lessons in schools or outside of them (*in scholis et extra*), and being at liberty to agree his own salary (a privilege granted by Alfonso the Magnanimous, in 1434, and obviously one at odds with the practice imposed by the Jewish local authorities).<sup>132</sup> A privilege dating from 1466 and granted by King John gave the Sicilian Jews the right to open a *Studium generale*, that is, an institution entitled to confer academic degrees.<sup>133</sup>

### *The Principal Authors and Their Works*

It is no easy matter to sketch a social history of Jewish culture in Palermo which takes account of texts and genres, but also of caesuras, absences and continuities; the *diseiecta membra* of cultural production and circulation would seem to accord greater fortune to medicine and astronomy than to literature and religion.

I will therefore proceed to delineate the intellectual biographies of some personages who lived and were active in Palermo during the Middle Ages. The first personality to emerge in full relief was Mašli'ah b. Eliyya (died c. 1056), known by the name of Ibn al-Bašaq (the Arabic rendering of *poseq*, "the one who takes legal decisions"), *dayyan* of Palermo and an active businessman; Mašli'ah studied in Baghdad with Ḥayy Ga'on and subsequently wrote a biography of him, now lost, dedicating it to Shemu'el ibn Naghrīla, the *nagid* of Granada. Jewish sources tell us that Mašli'ah discusses with Ḥayy Ga'on the exegesis of some verses from the Psalms, and with regard to Psalm CLXI, 5, the Ga'on invites him to consult the Nestorian Patriarch of Baghdad. After his return to the island, Mašli'ah remained in contact with Ḥayy Ga'on, and questioned him about Halakic questions concerning ritual slaughter; we also know that Mašli'ah's *responsa* were diffused across the Maghrib and Egypt.<sup>134</sup>

Between 1170 and 1180 Anaṭoli b. Yosef, a Jew from Marseilles and the future *dayyan* of Alexandria, was in Palermo; before leaving for Egypt

<sup>132</sup> JS, 4: 2403.

<sup>133</sup> *Studium generale facere, doctores, legum peritos, magistros et alios stipendiare et solvere, et in dicto studio approbatas sciencias quascumque convenientibus ad eum iudicis et alius legere et audiri facere seu permittere, et alia omnia et singula facere*, JS, VI, 3676.

<sup>134</sup> JS, 1: 28, 41, 59, 66–68, 75, 83, 103, 109, 114, 130, 132, 139, 156; Gil, "Sicily," pp. 161–66.

Anatoli visited various places in the island (Mazara, Termini Imerese and Messina); and last but not least made contact with the Jewish cultural elite of the Norman capital, with whom he exchanged some poems following the models of the Sephardic lyric tradition.<sup>135</sup>

The *Mishneh Torah* (composed in 1180), the *summa* in which Moses Maimonides codified Jewish law, combining *Halaka* and philosophical thought, circulated throughout Norman-Swabian Sicily from an early date. In his first letter addressed to the community of Montpellier (or Marseilles, according to another version), composed in September 1194 or 1195, Maimonides states that the text had got to Sicily before reaching southern France. The letter tackles the thorny question of belief in astrology, and Maimonides himself stresses that if the Provençal rabbis had already received the *Mishneh Torah* they would not have questioned him regarding the argument: "it is plain that this work of mine has not got there, since otherwise you would have already known my opinion... I believe that it should arrive before this *responsum* of mine, for in fact that work is already widely available in the island of Sicily, just as it is in the East, in the West and in Yemen." Obviously at the end of the 12th century Maimonides considered Sicily to be a part of the *dār al-Islām*, and still wholly subject to the spiritual leadership which emanated from those lands.<sup>136</sup>

In the Swabian period Jewish intellectuals originating in the Iberian peninsula or Provence reached the court of the Emperor Frederick II and became an integral part of his cultural projects. Thus, Yehuda ha-Kohen b. Matqa, Ya'aqov Anatoli and Mosheh ibn Tibbon played an active role both in the cultural life of the itinerant court and in the development of the cultural institutions sponsored by the State, as in the case of the *Studium* of Naples. The prolonged and uninterrupted absence of the Swabian court from the ancient *sedes Regni* meant that their presence in Palermo was not of course directly documented.<sup>137</sup>

<sup>135</sup> Samuel M. Stern, "A Twelfth-Century Circle of Hebrew Poets," *Journal of Jewish Studies* (1954), 60–79; 110–12; Id., "Un circolo di poeti ebrei siciliani nel secolo XII," *Bollettino del centro di studi filologici e linguistici siciliani* 4 (1956), 39–59.

<sup>136</sup> *Letters of Maimonides*, ed. Yitzhak Shilat, 2 (Jerusalem, 1995), n. 33, p. 478; Nadia Zeldes, "Jewish Culture in Sicily in the Age of Frederick II According to Jewish Sources," *Schede medievali* 47 (2009), 95–106.

<sup>137</sup> Mauro Zonta, "Traduzioni filosofico-scientifiche ed enciclopedie ebraiche alla corte di Federico II e dei suoi successori (secolo XIII)," *Materia giudaica* 13 (2008), 63–70; Giuseppe Mandalà, "Il Prologo delle *Risposte alle questioni siciliane* di Ibn Sab'īn come fonte storica. Politica mediterranea e cultura arabo-islamica nell'età di Federico II," *Schede Medievali* 45 (2007), 25–94.

During the years of the Vespers (30 March 1282) the famous mystic and Messiah, Avraham Abulafia,<sup>138</sup> settled in the island, inspiring a Kabbalistic circle in Messina and composing the great bulk of his writings. Abulafia's presence in Palermo is documented by a gloss upon the Latin translation of Abulafia's *De secretis Legis (Sitre Torah)* by the hand of Guglielmo Raimondo Moncada *alias* Flavius Mithridates, who affirms that: "Ego scio quod hic auctor fecit multa mirabilia Panhormi hoc anno et celebratur in monumentis hebreorum panhormitanorum in Sicilia mirum in modum et scio que sunt".<sup>139</sup> Moncada is at pains to specify that Abulafia had worked *mirabilia* in the city of Palermo in the year 5040/1279–80, adding that he had drawn his information from *monumenta*, that is, "documents," of those Palermitan Jews who had preserved the memory of them, and he also alludes to his own direct knowledge of them ("et scio que sunt").

One of Abulafia's contemporaries was Aḥiṭuv ben Yiṣḥaq, physician, philosopher and translator, active in Palermo;<sup>140</sup> Aḥiṭuv was a representative of the Sicilian Jewish *élite* who welcomed Abulafia to the island (1280–c. 1292). Aḥiṭuv was involved in person in the controversy (1280–c. 1285) between Shelomoh Ibn Adret and Abulafia, and aligned himself with the mystic, one of whose works, *Sefer ha-maftehot* (The Book of the Keys), he, along with his intimates, had commissioned.<sup>141</sup> Aḥiṭuv belonged to a dynasty of physicians; his father Yiṣḥaq/Busach had been in the service of Frederick II, and his brother David had likewise been a physician in the first decade after the Vespers.<sup>142</sup> Up until the expulsion of 1492 these "Medici" of Palermo would move in the shadow of power, and would have to fight to claim back old privileges, granted by virtue of their ancient *status* as physicians.<sup>143</sup>

Study of Aḥiṭuv's works reveals his abilities as man of letters and philosopher, even prior to Abulafia's arrival on the island (1280); his *Poem of the basket (Maḥberet ha-ṭene)* situates him on a cultural horizon that is anything but provincial. Aḥiṭuv takes on the task of interpreting the

<sup>138</sup> Moshe Idel, *La Cabbalà in Italia (1280–1510)*, ed. Fabrizio Lelli (Firenze, 2007), pp. 51–74; Hames J. Harvey, *Like Angels on Jacob's Ladder. Abraham Abulafia, the Franciscans, and Joachimism* (New York, 2007), pp. 29–53.

<sup>139</sup> Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. ebr. 190, f. 458v; Mandalà, "Aḥiṭuv," pp. 38–39.

<sup>140</sup> On the life and works of this personage see Mandalà, "Aḥiṭuv."

<sup>141</sup> The *Sefer ha-maftehot* is dated to 1289, Idel, *La Cabbalà*, p. 71; Mandalà, "Aḥiṭuv," pp. 37–38.

<sup>142</sup> Mandalà, "Aḥiṭuv," pp. 42–49.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 42–53.

thought of Maimonides and recounts a voyage of his beyond the grave, a pretext for expounding the articles of Judaism (*yesodot*, “fundamentals,” or *‘iqqarim*, “principles”);<sup>144</sup> we are plainly concerned here with an original Sicilian reflection of the Maimonidean dispute. In addition to this aspect of Aḥiṭuv’s production one should also refer to his role as mediator from the Arabic, or more precisely from the Judeo-Arabic to the Hebrew, which is evident in the translation of the *Treatise on the Art of Logic* attributed to Maimonides.<sup>145</sup> Such activities were greatly reinforced by the cultural milieu to which our protagonist belonged; indeed, his intimates, that is, David and his two sons, Samuel and Gaudius, let alone *magister Muse* (to be identified with the famous translator from Arabic into Latin, Moses of Palermo), translated the ancient privileges of the Norman Chancellery from Arabic into Latin.<sup>146</sup> The double activity of translation of this kind, scientific and administrative, is highly revealing; in late 13th-century Palermo, a distant heir to Norman triumphs, Aḥiṭuv and his circle were the only interpreters capable of tackling a translation from the Arabic, be it the Arabic in Hebrew characters used by Maimonides, or the Arabic employed by the Norman Chancellery. The translations were essentially for two different types of readers, on the one hand the educated elites of the Jewish communities, and on the other hand the Christian religious and political institutions.

In parallel to the conquest of the island by the Martins, we observe a Jewish migratory influx consisting of individuals or groups who arrived from the Iberian peninsula.<sup>147</sup> The movement of population may be explained either by the new sovereign’s determination to reform the Jewish communities on the island or in the light of the crisis suffered by the Iberian communities which culminated in the persecutions of Castile

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<sup>144</sup> Jefim Schirmann, “Zur Geschichte der hebräischen Poesie in Apulien und Sizilien,” *Mitteilungen des Forschungsinstituts für hebräische Dichtung* 1 (1933), 95–147: 132–47; Mandalà, “Aḥiṭuv,” pp. 56–59.

<sup>145</sup> Edition of the text by Israel Efros, “Maimonides’ Arabic *Treatise on Logic Introduction*,” *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 34 (1966), 155–160; 9–42 (Arabic in Hebrew characters text); *additamenta* by Lawrence V. Berman, “Some Remarks on the Arabic Texts of Maimonides’ ‘Treatise on the Art of Logic,’” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 88, 2 (1968), 340–342. Regarding Aḥiṭuv’s translation see Israel Efros, “*Mūllôt ha-higgayôn*. Maimonides’ *Treatise on Logic (Maqāla fī šinā‘at al-mantiq)*. The Original Arabic and Three Hebrew Translations,” *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 8 (1937–38), 1–65; 1–136 (Hebrew texts).

<sup>146</sup> *JS*, 1: 267; 257; Mandalà, “Aḥiṭuv,” pp. 46–48.

<sup>147</sup> Henri Bresc, “La Sicile médiévale, terre de refuge pour les juifs: migration et exil,” *Al-Masāq. Islam and the Medieval Mediterranean* 17, 1 (2006), 31–46: 36 and *passim*.

(1391) and Aragon, and in the dispute of Tortosa (1413–14).<sup>148</sup> Amongst the new arrivals was Yiṣḥaq ben Shelomoh ben Ṣaddiq Ibn al-Aḥḍab, an exegete, astronomer, mathematician, translator and poet who lived in Sicily between the end of the 14th and the beginning of the 15th century,<sup>149</sup> a pupil of the Rabbi of Toledo, Yehuda bar Asher II of Burgos (d. 1391), he had spent some years in the *dār al-Islām* before reaching Syracuse in 1395–96, after a shipwreck.<sup>150</sup>

In 1418 we again encounter Yiṣḥaq, under the name of Gaudius Alachadeb, citizen of Palermo, where he held the offices of arbiter, spiritual judge and *notarius Iudeorum*.<sup>151</sup> Gaudius/Yiṣḥaq died in Palermo before the year 1434, and probably in the course of the year 1431. Yiṣḥaq composed various works that fit within the context of the community's existence on the island: an exegetical treatise on the Passover Haggada which contains several allusions to the customary usages of the Sicilian Jews;<sup>152</sup> a brief commentary on the Biblical measures, *The Golden Tongue* (*Leshon ha-zahav*),<sup>153</sup> and finally a short philosophical treatise *On the definition of words* (*Ma'amar be-gidre ha-devarim*).<sup>154</sup> This production of texts strictly for the use of the community is flanked by significant scientific activity, which has had a greater impact and whose circulation has transcended the bounds of the island. In Syracuse, and at the invitation of the learned local Jewish elite, Yiṣḥaq Ibn al-Aḥḍab translated from Arabic into Hebrew, and adapted, the *Talkhīṣ a'māl al-ḥiṣāb* (*Compendium on*

<sup>148</sup> On the persecutions of 1391 see Yitzhak Baer, *Historia de los judíos en la España cristiana* (Barcelona, 1998), pp. 531–60.

<sup>149</sup> Giuseppe Mandalà, "Da Toledo a Palermo: Yiṣḥaq ben Shelomoh Ibn al-Aḥḍab in Sicilia (ca. 1395/96–1431)," in Giacomo Corazzol, Mauro Perani, ed., *Flavio Mitridate. Mediatore fra culture nel contesto dell'Ebraismo siciliano del XV secolo* (Caltabellotta, Agrigento, 30 June–1 July 2008) (Palermo, 2012), pp. 1–16.

<sup>150</sup> London, British Library, Or. 2806, f. 11a; George Margoliouth, *Catalogue of the Hebrew and Samaritan Manuscripts in the British Museum. Part III. Sections VIII, IX: Miscellaneous MSS* (London 1915 [reprinted 1965]), n. 1013, pp. 335–37: 335.

<sup>151</sup> *JS*, 9: pp. 5823–5824; *JS*, 4: 2024; *AE*, p. 272. The Hebrew name Yiṣḥaq, literally "he will laugh," was translated into Latin as *Gaudius*, whereas the family name, which was of Arabic origin, Ibn al-Aḥḍab, literally "the hunchback's son," is rendered in the Latin documents as *Alachadeb*, *Abenladeb*, *Abeladel*, *Belladeb*, *Biladeb*, etc., see Mandalà, "Da Toledo," pp. 7–9.

<sup>152</sup> *Haggada šel Pesah. Pesah dorot dine layl ha-seder u-peruš 'al Haggada le-rabbenu Yiṣḥaq ben r. Shelomoh al-Aḥḍab*, ed. Yitzhak S. Spiegel (Jerusalem 2000), pp. 23, 28, 29.

<sup>153</sup> Yitzhak S. Spiegel, "Leṣon ha-zahav le-r. Yiṣḥaq ben Šelomoh al-Aḥḍab," *Bekhol Dera-kheka Da'ehu. Journal of Torah and Scholarship* 12 (2001), 5–34.

<sup>154</sup> Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Heb. 246; Moritz Steinschneider, *Die hebraeischen Handschriften der K. Hof- und Staatsbibliothek in Muenchen* (Munich, 1895), p. 118.



*the workings of calculus*) of the Moroccan mathematician Ibn al-Bannā'.<sup>155</sup> The astronomical works stand out in particular, and they circulated more widely: The *Precious Instrument*, or *Kele ħemda*, a short treatise which includes two letters on the astrolabe invented in Syracuse in 1396, and *The Intermediate Instrument* or *Kele memuṣa'*, a treatise in twenty-six chapters in which there is a description of an astronomical instrument (*equatorium*) which combined the astrolabe with the quadrant invented by Ya'āqov ben Makir around 1300.<sup>156</sup> Yiṣḥaq's greatest success was the *Oraḥ selula* or *Paved Way*, where he develops his theories on the motion of the stars, and to describe the latter he includes an apparatus of tables.<sup>157</sup> We encounter a Latin translation of this work in the section entitled *Defectus Solis et Lune* (f. 30r–61v) of the manuscript Vaticano Urbinate Latino 1384, assembled by Guglielmo Raimondo Moncada, alias Flavius Mithridates, for Federico da Montefeltro, Duke of Urbino in the year 1480–81 or 1482.<sup>158</sup>

Yiṣḥaq Ibn al-Aḥḍab had at least three sons who lived and were active in Syracuse and Palermo: Ṣaddiq, Avraham and Ya'āqov,<sup>159</sup> and we know of this last that he was proficient *in utraque lingua arabica videlicet et latina* (before 1456).<sup>160</sup> The cultural activities of this important family, the Belladeb, were rooted in the life of the Sicilian communities throughout the 15th century; in 1481, Gaudius, one of Ya'āqov's sons, sold some medical treatises to the Jews of Polizzi, namely, Avicenna's *Canon*, Maimonides' *Aphorisms* and Galen's *Ars parva* with the commentary by 'Alī b. Riḍwān (998–c. 1061).<sup>161</sup>

<sup>155</sup> Cambridge, University Library, Heb. Add. 492.1 [IMHM 16786], f. 1v; Ilana Wartenberg, "Iggeret ha-Mispar by Isaac ben Solomon Ibn al-Aḥḍab (Sicily, 14th century)," *Judaica* 64 (2008), 18–36, 149–61.

<sup>156</sup> Bernard R. Goldstein, "Descriptions of Astronomical Instruments in Hebrew," in David A. King and George Saliba, ed., *From Deferent to Equant: a Volume of Studies in the History of Science in the Ancient and Medieval Near East in Honor of E. S. Kennedy*, *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 550 (New York, 1987), 105–141: 124–36.

<sup>157</sup> Bernard R. Goldstein and José Chabás, "Isaac ibn al-Ḥadib and Flavius Mithridates: the Diffusion of an Iberian Astronomical Tradition in the Late Middle Ages," *Journal for the History of Astronomy* 37, 2, 127, (2006), 147–72.

<sup>158</sup> Angelo Michele Piemontese, "Guglielmo Raimondo Moncada alla Corte di Urbino," in Mauro Perani, ed., *Guglielmo Raimondo Moncada alias Flavio Mitridate. Un ebreo converso siciliano. Atti del Convegno internazionale Caltabellotta (Agrigento, 23–24 ottobre 2004)* (Palermo, 2008), pp. 151–71: 159.

<sup>159</sup> Mandalà, "Da Toledo," pp. 9–13.

<sup>160</sup> ASP, Not. N. Aprea 834, f. 376 (Palermo, 20.04.1456); Henri Bresc and Shlomo D. Goitein, "Un inventaire dotal de juifs siciliens (1479)," *MEFR Moyen Âge-Temps Modernes* 82, 2 (1970), 903–917: 905 n. 2.

<sup>161</sup> Carlo Borgese, *Documenti editi e inediti su Polizzi Generosa e sul comprensorio delle Madonie* (Palermo, 1999), p. 55 (Notaio Giovanni Perdicaro, 24.05.1481; 29.05.1481); Mandalà, "Da Toledo," pp. 12–13.

In the Palermo of the second half of the 15th century, probably before the conversion occurring in 1467, Guglielmo Raimondo Moncada, alias Flavius Mithridates, the famous Sicilian Jewish convert and the translator of Kabbalistic works for Pico della Mirandola,<sup>162</sup> was also active. In those years the city was a theatre for the “invention” of epigraphic forgeries linked to literary traditions dating back to the *Sefer Yosippon* and to other Hebrew texts; an object of mystification was the “Chaldaic” (in reality Arabic-Kufic) inscription from the tower of *Baych/Bahr* in Palermo, interpreted by a mysterious “Chaldean” from Syria on behalf of the Dominican Pietro Ranzano, between 1463 and 1469. Others involved in the episode, apart from Ranzano, were the Pisan Jew Ysac de Guillelmo and the praetor of the city, Pietro Speciale, and their purpose, in an atmosphere of intense *campanilismo*, was to vaunt the primacy and antiquity of Palermo, a city that had, they argued, been founded by the descendants of Esau, Zepho and Eliphaz, and by “una gran compagnia di homini Chaldei, a li quali si adjunsino Damasceni et Phenici.”<sup>163</sup>

This context of militant erudition also featured Gerardo Agliata, a canon of the Cathedral of Palermo and a figure with pronounced Hebrew and Chaldaic interests (*litterarum hebraicarum caldearumque interpretem . . . in eisdem litteris ebraicis caldaicisque satis invigilaveritis ut aliquando Ecclesie Sancte Catholice aliquod ex eisdem litteris lumen afferre possitis*).<sup>164</sup> Another figure active in Palermo in the second half of the 15th century was Yirmiyahu/Jeremiah Kohen, a member of an eminent Jewish family of rabbis and physicians, and the author of a commentary in Hebrew upon the *De Sphaera* of Menelaus of Alexandria in Vat. ebr. 379, a manuscript which transmits texts of the astronomical school of Yiṣḥaq Ibn al-Aḥḍab.<sup>165</sup> *De Sphaera* is the only book by Menelaus to have survived, a work in

<sup>162</sup> Raffaele Starrabba, “Guglielmo Raimondo Moncada ebreo convertito siciliano del sec. XV,” *Archivio storico siciliano* n. s., 3 (1878), 15–91; Giulio Busi, “Chi non ammirerà il nostro camaleonte?. La biblioteca cabbalistica di Giovanni Pico della Mirandola,” in Giulio Busi, *L'enigma dell'ebraico nel Rinascimento* (Turin, 2007), pp. 25–45.

<sup>163</sup> Pietro Ranzano, *Delle origini e vicende di Palermo*, ed. Gioacchino Di Marzo (Palermo, 1864), pp. 62–67; Nadia Zeldes, “The Last Multi-Cultural Encounter in Medieval Sicily: a Dominican Scholar, an Arabic Inscription, and a Jewish Legend,” *Mediterranean Historical Review* 21, 2 (2006), 159–91.

<sup>164</sup> Cordova, 20 august 1483 [Palermo, 5 april 1484], ASP, Protonotaro del Regno, Reg. 107, ff. 226v–228r: 227v; Raffaele Starrabba, “Uno studioso di lingue orientali nel secolo XV,” *Archivio storico siciliano* 4 (1879), 469–70.

<sup>165</sup> *Hebrew Manuscripts in the Vatican Library. Catalogue. Compiled by the Staff of the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts, Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem*, ed. Benjamin Richler, in collaboration with Malachi Beit-Arié and Nurit Pasternak (Vatican City, 2008), *Studi e testi*, 438, pp. 321–24.

which the spherical triangles and their application to astronomy are described, so that we are, in other words, at the very beginnings of spherical trigonometry. In 1471, Geremia Cuyno, the son of Sabet, was accused, along with Benedetto Canet, of *nephandum crimen*,<sup>166</sup> and the Palermitan Jewish community, also in order to gain the sovereign's approval for some statutes, was forced to pay a settlement of 100 ounces.<sup>167</sup> Some months after the edict of expulsion (18 June 1492), Geremia Cuyno and David Lu Medicu translated the accounts of the community of Palermo into Latin, and claimed from the authorities a salary for this service (Palermo, 26 November 1492).<sup>168</sup>

### *Medicine and Cultural Circulation*

The Sicilian Jews were especially noted for the practice of medicine. Although there is virtually no reference to this fact in the documents from the Geniza, the presence of physicians is implied by the extensive trade in drugs and spices which transited through the island. A copious number of Jewish physicians were in evidence in Palermo and in Sicily at different points between the 13th and 15th centuries; they were at the summit of a Jewish oligarchy which acquired the royal *familiaritas* in virtue of the art, and therefore enjoyed fiscal exemptions and privileges, even to the detriment of the community itself. As intermediaries between community and monarchy, the richest and most famous Sicilian *magistri physici* controlled the heights of their community's institutions, exercised the function of judge in the rabbinical court (*curia Iudeorum*), as did Vita Xifuni, Abraam Belladeb, Moyses Chazeni, Iosef Xunnina, or likewise came to occupy the office of *dienchelele* or "supreme judge," as was the case with Moyses de la Bonavoglia and Iosue Bennacrimi. Medical knowledge was handed down in the familial sphere or in that of the wider community; from the 14th–15th century the wealthier studied in the universities of Padua, Bologna and Ferrara, and obtained their licence after taking the chief physician's examination.

As yet we possess no medical works composed on the island, though in Palermo and in some other places there are plentiful traces of the circulation of texts and manuscripts, for example, *Avicenna's Canon*,

<sup>166</sup> *JS*, 6: 3913.

<sup>167</sup> *JS*, 6: 3920.

<sup>168</sup> *ASP, Conservatoria di Registro*, vol. 872, f. 183rv; Mandalà, "Aḥiṭuv," p. 60 n. 158.

Arabic but in Hebrew characters and transcribed in Palermo in 1246,<sup>169</sup> or a “Judeo-Arabic” miscellany containing medical works, copied at Palermo in 1342, both works transcribed by, and having belonged to Palermitan Jewish physicians.<sup>170</sup> Apart from their intrinsically medical interest, the *colophons* document a concern with Jewish philosophy: the treatise *Emuna rama* by Avraham ibn Dā’ūd was copied at Palermo in 1475.<sup>171</sup>

The circulation of texts and manuscripts is also documented by the 803 volumes mentioned in Sicilian notarial documentation; we are concerned here with books that belonged to Jews who were living on the island during the 15th century. The volumes certainly represent a part, albeit somewhat fortuitously selected, of the cultural interests of the Sicilian Jews; Biblical books and prayer books, parts of the Mishna and of the Talmud, texts from the post-Talmudic rabbinical literature, religion and philosophy, but also Hebrew grammar, commentaries, *Qabbala* and letters, as well as texts in Latin and in Judeo-Arabic (*morisco*). In Palermo there feature some lists of books that can be ascribed to private libraries, like that of *magister* Vita Xifuni, *judeus medicus civis Panormi*, which numbers forty-one volumes of medicine and of other sciences (Palermo, 1 December 1443);<sup>172</sup> or the inventory of the very rich library of Nissim de Randacio (Palermo, 14–16 September 1478) in which seventy-two books concerned with religious matters are listed in detail.<sup>173</sup> The books mentioned in the inventories are manuscripts, but shortly before the expulsion printed works put on

<sup>169</sup> Modena, Biblioteca Estense α.N.5.15, *Canon* of Avicenna, Arabic but in Hebrew characters, copied in Palermo, perhaps in 1286 (or 1246) by Shemu’el ben Yosef *ha-rofe’*, for his own use; the copyist’s son, Immanu’el, has added a note in Hebrew, in Sciacca, in 1322–23. The letters indicating the date in the *colophon*, written in Judeo-Arabic, have been almost entirely cancelled and rewritten as [504]6 (1286); this annotation would seem to confirm the date of 1286, since otherwise it is hard to see how its author could be the son of the original copyist 76 years after the date at which the text had been copied; Carlo Bernheimer, *Catalogo dei manoscritti orientali della Biblioteca Estense* (Rome, 1960), n. 43.

<sup>170</sup> Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Ebraico 361, a miscellany, in Arabic but in Hebrew characters, containing an explanation of the foreign words in the Pentateuch (*Perush ha-millot ha-zarot ba-Torah*); a list of medicinal herbs and their properties; a fragment from the *Viaticum* (*Sedat ha-derahim*), a medical treatise by Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm Ibn al-Jazzār translated from the Arabic into Hebrew by Mosheh Ibn Tibbon; other short treatises, a dictionary and some commercial correspondence; copied at Palermo in 1342 by Dawid b. Eliyya *ha-rofe’* for Yiṣḥaq *ha-rofe’* ben Nissim *ha-zaqen*, see *Hebrew Manuscripts*, pp. 303–305.

<sup>171</sup> Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Ebraico 341, *Emuna rama* by Avraham b. Dā’ūd, in Hebrew, copied at Palermo in 1475 by Yiṣḥaq ben Shelomoh, known as Jabal, for Mosheh ben Mattatya known as Hazzan, see *Hebrew Manuscripts*, p. 290.

<sup>172</sup> Henri Bresc, *Libre et société en Sicile (1229–1499)* (Palermo, 1971), pp. 88, 170.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 177, 263–66.

sale by Jewish merchants coming from northern Italy, for example, Abram de Fano (1477–1482) and Ysac Raba (1492), also began to appear on the Palermitan market.<sup>174</sup>

### *Ritual and Traditions*

From 'Ovadya's description, and from the huge quantity of archival documents, various pieces of information have come to light regarding the customs, traditions and popular religiosity of the Jews of Palermo, though they have yet to be adequately assessed and contextualised.<sup>175</sup> Where the peculiarities of the rite followed by the Sicilian Jews are concerned, and despite there being a certain number of texts available, the research remains largely inconclusive; there would appear to have been differences within the various communities on the island, and probably within the Palermitan community itself.<sup>176</sup> It may be that there is an allusion to this plurality in the *Ḥizunim ke-minhag ha-ma'aravim she-nitgoreru be-Siṣilya* (*Liturgical hymns according to the rite of the Westerners who used to live in Sicily*), printed at Constantinople in 1580, and preserved in a unique, incomplete copy at the Jewish Theological Seminary of New York; we cannot rule out the possibility that the *ma'aravim*, that is, the "Westerners," were the descendants of the Jews of the Garbo who arrived in Palermo and in Sicily in 1239.<sup>177</sup>

### JEWISH SETTLEMENT

Jewish settlement is an essentially urban phenomenon; the city is the place in which the religious life and that of the community unfolded, and

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., pp. 224, 225, 226, 324.

<sup>175</sup> Elliot Horowitz, "Towards a Social History of Jewish Popular Religion. R. Obadiah of Bertinoro on Jews of Palermo," *The Journal of Religious History* 17, 2 (1992), 138–51; SC, pp. 387–92.

<sup>176</sup> Ariel Viterbo, *Il rito liturgico e le feste degli ebrei di Sicilia*, in Nicolò Bucaria, Michele Luzzati, Angela Tarantino, eds., *Ebrei e Sicilia* (Palermo, 2002), pp. 127–33; 129.

<sup>177</sup> The copy consists of 190 surviving folios; the work is a formulary of the prayers for feast-days and special Sabbaths; it contains 327 *piyyuṭim* (poetic compositions for liturgical use) for Sabbaths and feast-days (excluding the day of *Kippur*), amongst them 209 compositions not known in other sources; the authors identified are 55 in number, and amongst them 8 are likewise unknown, see Shlomo Bernstein, "Remains of Poems from the Golden Age," *Hebrew Union College Annual* XVI (1941), 99–159: 100–103 (in Hebrew); Cecil Roth, "Jewish Intellectual Life in Medieval Sicily," *Jewish Quarterly Review* XLVII–XLVIII (1956–58), 317–35: 332–33; Viterbo, "Il rito liturgico," p. 128.

in which the technical, economic and commercial specialisations of the Jews took shape. In the Islamic period (1050–1060) a foreign Jew reaching Sicily acquired rights of residence by inscribing his name in the register of imposts (*al-qānūn*);<sup>178</sup> from the 13th century local legislation began to reflect an urban dualism between Jews who were *cives* and those who were *exteri* or *externi*, that is, between Jews who were citizens and those who were foreigners;<sup>179</sup> citizenship in Palermo entailed tax burdens and concessions, and it was a privilege that one acquired either through marriage or after a prolonged period of residence (one year, one month, one week and one day).<sup>180</sup>

Jewish life was focussed upon the synagogue, the hall (known in Hebrew as *keneset*, but in Sicily also as *miskita*, loaned from the Arabic *maṣjid*) in which religious services were held, a structure that would often also include outbuildings for the use of the community, such as meeting rooms, schools, charitable institutions and hospitals. Every community had also to be provided with a ritual bath (*miqweh*), a slaughterhouse and a cemetery, strictly located outside the walls. This set of structures serving the needs of the community constituted the nucleus around which the dwelling-places and workshops of the Jews tended to be concentrated, giving rise to a separate but not exclusive quarter. In medieval Sicily the “ghetto” did not exist; the communities assembled for religious reasons, whereas any coercive measures as regards residence promulgated by the political and administrative authorities were few and far between.

### *The Topography*

The settlement of Jews in Palermo had already been noted by Ibn Ḥawqal in 973;<sup>181</sup> this traveller describes two distinct cities (*al-madīna*), both furnished with walls, the Cassaro/al-Qaṣr and the Kalsa/al-Khālīṣa. He further mentions three quarters situated outside the walls: the quarter of the Slavonians/Ḥārat al-Ṣaqālība; the New quarter/Ḥārat al-Jadīda; the quarter of the Ibn Siqlāb mosque/Ḥārat maṣjid Ibn Siqlāb. Yet only forty years after Ibn Ḥawqal’s visit the quarter of the Ibn Siqlāb mosque and the

<sup>178</sup> JS, 1: 127; AE, p. 27.

<sup>179</sup> For the documents see above; Straus, *Gli Ebrei*, pp. 35, 77.

<sup>180</sup> On citizenship see ACFUP, 7. *Registri di Lettere (1340–48)*, ed. Laura Sciascia (Palermo, 2007), doc. 161, pp. 164–68; Illuminato Peri, *Villani e cavalieri nella Sicilia medievale* (Rome-Bari, 1993), p. 84; Pietro Corrao, “Uomini d’affari stranieri nelle città siciliane del tardo medioevo,” *Revista d’historia medieval* 11 (2000), 139–62: 152.

<sup>181</sup> Ibn Ḥawqal, *BAS ar.*, 1: p. 16; *BAS it.*, 1: 21.

quarter of the Sclavonians would seem to have been ringed by their own walls.<sup>182</sup> When describing the nine gates in the walls of the Cassaro, Ibn Ḥawqal adds that outside the gate of Iron/bāb al-Ḥadīd<sup>183</sup> was to be found the quarter of the Jews or ḥārat al-Yahūd;<sup>184</sup> we are therefore concerned here with a “quarter”, perhaps a simple street or district, forming part of one of the three urban divisions *extra moenia*, probably the quarter of the Ibn Siqlāb mosque.<sup>185</sup>

In the documents from the Geniza there is mention of some places frequented by Jews: the *simāt* [*al-balāt*], the *ruga* or *via Marmorea*, the main artery and commercial street of the city already described by Ibn Ḥawqal; the *mashraba*, a spring or well we cannot identify; the *funduq al-Samanṭārī*, a storehouse where Jews in transit stayed and kept their goods, and also *funduq al-zabīb*, “the storehouse of the grapes.”<sup>186</sup> Already in the Islamic period one can postulate the existence of an auction market, and such a function could have been performed in the building known as the *Rachaba* (Arabic: *Raḥaba*), which 12th-century documents place in the street of the spice-sellers (*al-‘aṭṭārīn*).<sup>187</sup>

The topography altered radically between the 11th and 12th centuries: the old Jewish quarter, together with the urbanised area outside the walls

<sup>182</sup> *Kitāb Gharāʾib*, it., 409–449: 420–23 : 421–22, 433–34.

<sup>183</sup> The gate of Iron was subsequently called the *porta Iudaica*; it was located near to the present-day via dell’Università, next to via Omodei; nearby was built the church of Sant’Elia *de porta Iudaica*, now demolished, formerly in the area of the cloister of the church of S. Giuseppe dei Teatini, see Giovanni Di Giovanni, *La topografia antica dal secolo X al XV*, 2 vols. (Palermo, 1889–1890), 1: pp. 224, 251, 453, 447; Adalgisa De Simone, “Palermo nei geografi e viaggiatori arabi del Medioevo,” *Studi Magrebini* II (1968), 129–89: 138–45, 148–49 e n. 76; Rosario La Duca, *Repertorio bibliografico degli edifici religiosi di Palermo* (Palermo 1991), p. 90; Franco D’Angelo, “La città di Palermo tra la fine dell’età araba e la fine dell’età normanna,” in *La città di Palermo nel Medioevo*, ed. Franco D’Angelo (Palermo, 2002), pp. 7–33: 14.

<sup>184</sup> Aside from the Ḥārat Abī Ḥimāz identified by Ibn Ḥawqal as being outside the gate without a name (but which we now know to have been the *bāb sūq al-dajāj*, “the gate of the Chicken market”), the *Kitāb Gharāʾib al-funūn wa-mulaḥ al-ʿuyūn* (c. 1020) and the map contained within it indicates the existence of other extra-urban “quarters” (*hāra*), graphically endowed with walls: to the South-West of the city the Ḥārat al-Tājī (the quarter of al-Tājī), endowed with or connected to the walls; the Ḥārat al-farīda (the quarter of the Divine Precept); and the Ḥāra tusammā muṣallā Abī Ḥajar (the quarter called the place of prayer of Abū Ḥajar), indicated in the map as being without any walls; to the South the Ḥārat banī Lakhm (the quarter of the banū Lakhm); to the South-East the Ḥārat kanīsat al-farūḥ (the quarter of the Church of Joy) and the Ḥārat ḥufrat ghullān (the quarter of the Ditch of the Acacia trees), see *Kitāb Gharāʾib*, pp. 420–23.

<sup>185</sup> De Simone, “Palermo,” p. 148 n. 76.

<sup>186</sup> Gil, “Sicily,” p. 146.

<sup>187</sup> *AE*, p. 26; 421; in the Islamic period we already hear of a square, a meeting-place (*maḥḍar*) called *al-Raḥba*, see *Kitāb Gharāʾib* it., p. 421.

of the Cassaro, was now to be found inside the new city walls, in a position that was nonetheless decentred as regards the seat of power, the Galka and the royal palace.<sup>188</sup> During the 12th century the enduring presence of the Jews in the old Jewish quarter is implied by the miniature in the *Liber ad honorem Augusti* of Peter of Eboli, which he wrote between 1194 and 1197; there the Jews are placed in the quarter known as *Ideisin*, which roughly corresponds to the future Albergheria; the toponym refers to *al-dayyāšīn*, those who worked on the *dīs* (*ampelodesmos mauritanicus*) a plant that is commonly found in the Palermitan region and was used, amongst other things, to make fishing nets (see Fig. 10.2).<sup>189</sup> Nonetheless from the Norman period onwards the houses of the Jews tended to be concentrated in the quarter of the Cassaro, in the shadow of the royal palace, in close proximity to the houses of Muslims and Christians, as is testified by a Greek deed of 1146 in which the house of the Jew Seba stands within a courtyard belonging to Eugenius, son of George of Antioch, and which adjoins the house of Phator, of Temmem, of Bozallo, and of the son of Bouchairies.<sup>190</sup>

Notwithstanding the fact that already in the Norman-Swabian period city legislation denied Jews and Saracens the *ius prothimiseos*, that is, the right of pre-emption over a neighbour's house,<sup>191</sup> and the fact that at the beginning of the 14th century higher rates of taxation were applied to the purchase of immovable goods belonging to Christians (*platea someriorum*),<sup>192</sup> the tendency to live within the Cassaro greatly intensified between the 13th and the 14th century.<sup>193</sup> In 1239 the Emperor Frederick II intervened, forcing the Jews of the Garbo to live outside the walls of the Cassaro, possibly in *casalina* to be built with that purpose in mind,<sup>194</sup>

<sup>188</sup> Pezzini, "Articolazioni," pp. 733–38; Roberta Sciortino, "Archeologia del sistema fortificato medievale di Palermo. Nuovi dati per la conoscenza della seconda cinta muraria (tardo X–XII secolo)," *Archeologia medievale* XXXIV (2007), 283–96; Franco D'Angelo, "La Palermo araba del XII secolo descritta da Hugo Falcandus," *Schede medievali* 47 (2009), 153–76.

<sup>189</sup> Bern, Burgerbibliothek, cod. 120, c. 98r; Giovan Battista Siragusa, "Sulla topografia medievale di Palermo," *Rendiconti della R. Accademia dei Lincei* XXII, fasc. 3 (1913), 45–66; Maria Andaloro, "Federico e la Sicilia fra continuità e discontinuità," in *Federico e la Sicilia: dalla terra alla corona. Arti figurative e arti suntuarie*, ed. Maria Andaloro, 2: pp. 2–30: 4–5 and fig. 3; Pezzini, "Articolazioni," pp. 746–47.

<sup>190</sup> Cusa, 1: VI, pp. 71–73; *AE*, p. 26; the same document also features the house of Bou Sechel the Jew, son of Bourripch.

<sup>191</sup> *JS*, 1: 196.

<sup>192</sup> *JS*, 2: 342.

<sup>193</sup> As regards the Jewish presence in the Cassaro at the end of the 13th century, see *JS*, 1: 260; 261; 296; 297.

<sup>194</sup> *RF*, 1: n. 261, pp. 263–267.



and in 1312 Frederick III ordered the expulsion of all the Jews from the Cassaro, a discriminatory measure that caused the immediate emptying of the quarter.<sup>195</sup> Frederick III's order could have been dictated by a concern to create a royal space, one that was fully religious and reinforced by the Iberian *call-s* created by Alfonso III under the influence of Arnold of Villanova and of the spiritual Franciscans.<sup>196</sup> The Cassaro would subsequently be repopulated by "burgenses terrarum et locorum circumiacentium," endowed with the same rights and subject to the same fiscal burdens as the previous inhabitants;<sup>197</sup> already shortly before, in 1321, Jews were living in the Cassaro, and the praetor of Palermo obliged the *magister xurte* (chief of police) not to harrass them, an instruction reiterated in 1339.<sup>198</sup>

Apart from this lull, the Jewish presence is constantly documented in the Cassaro up until the expulsion, to such an extent, indeed, that in 1487 'Ovadya of Bertinoro declared: "Palermo is the great and chief city of the Kingdom of Sicily, and there are some 850 householders, all gathered in one street [quarter], the best of the land."<sup>199</sup> The Palermitan notarial deeds of the 15th century delineate a dense presence of Jewish houses and shops on either side of the *platea marmorea*, the principal artery of the Cassaro and of the city, adjoining noble churches and palaces (we are especially concerned here with the zone of the Cancelliere, the monasteries of Montervergini, of Santa Caterina, the Martorana, S. Giacomo la Marina, Santa Maria La Nuova, S. Teodoro, S. Biagio and S. Ippolito).<sup>200</sup> In the Cassaro the presence of the houses of illustrious Jewish physicians left a tangible sign in the toponomastics, as in the case of the *vanella* of *magister* David Lu Medicu or of Moyses Chetibi."<sup>201</sup> No sooner is one outside the Cassaro than the Jewish houses cluster in the area of the old

<sup>195</sup> *JS*, 2: 341.

<sup>196</sup> David Abulafia, *Le attività economiche degli ebrei siciliani attorno al 1300*, in *Gli ebrei in Sicilia sino all'espulsione del 1492*, pp. 89–95; 93; Henri Bresc, "Spazio e potere nella Palermo medievale," in Cataldo Roccaro, ed., *Palermo medievale. Testi dell'VIII colloquio medievale (Palermo, 26–27 aprile 1989)* (Palermo, 1998), pp. 7–18: 11.

<sup>197</sup> *JS*, 2: 340, 341.

<sup>198</sup> *JS*, 2: 349, 528, 529.

<sup>199</sup> *From Italy to Jerusalem*, pp. 37–38; *SC*, p. 252; Italian translation Lagumina, "Le giudaiche," p. 13.

<sup>200</sup> Antonino Giuffrida, "Lu quartieri di lu Cassaru'. Note sul quartiere del Cassaro a Palermo nella prima metà del secolo XV," *MEFR. Moyen Âge-Temps Modernes* 83, 1 (1971), 439–82; Salvatore Graditi, "Fonti notarili inedite per la storia degli ebrei in Sicilia," in *Gli ebrei in Sicilia sino all'espulsione del 1492*, pp. 55–74.

<sup>201</sup> Mandalà, "Aḥīṭuv," pp. 48–49; *JS*, 14: p. 916.

Jewish quarter, the *Iudaica* (*contrata Iudayce civitatis Panormi*),<sup>202</sup> in which arose the court of the Praetor, the seat of civic power (from 1320 onwards).<sup>203</sup> There were few houses around the synagogue, in whose vicinity were to be found the Jewish warehouse and slaughterhouse, the whole surrounded by gardens and artisans' workshops.<sup>204</sup>

Between 1300 and 1400 Jewish housing and furnishings were no different from that of the other Palermitans.<sup>205</sup> In the 15th century the immovable patrimony was not confined just to the Cassaro and to *Iudaica*, but was also extended along the axes of the Albergheria and Seralcadi. In 15th-century Jewish Palermo there was frequently some disjuncture between house and shop, between residential centre and public square; many Jewish shops were located along the *platea marmorea*, right next to the houses or on the ground floor of *case solerate*, but the upper quarter was not a very active commercial centre.

Other Jewish shops, whether owned or rented, were in the *via dei Pisani* or the *via dei Catalani*, on the main axis which runs from S. Francesco to S. Giacomo la Marina. A guild specialisation also prevailed, with the smiths being at the Ferrara of *porta Iudaica* close to the synagogue, while the spice-sellers and haberdashers had shops in the Lattarini in the Albergheria, the artisans working in leather being based at the Conceria in the Seralcadi. Some warehouses belonging to Jews were scattered within the urban network extending between San Giacomo la Marina, the port, the salt mill, the public brothel and the Fieravecchia (*piazza Rivoluzione*).<sup>206</sup> Those artisanal activities considered to be none too clean or else dangerous, such as oil presses, were placed at a distance from residential quarters, on the periphery of the city or near to gardens where one could have the detritus dried and thrown out, in the Ferrara, the Guilla, the Seralcadi and the Fieravecchia.<sup>207</sup>

Extra-urban properties, orchards, gardens and smallholdings are occasionally mentioned in the documents from the Geniza and in the Norman period, allowing us a valuable glimpse into land ownership among

<sup>202</sup> *JS*, 1: 299.

<sup>203</sup> Pietro Gulotta, "Le vicende del Palazzo municipale fra documenti e cronache," in Camillo Filangeri, Pietro Gulotta, Maria Antonietta Spadaro, eds., *Palermo, Palazzo delle Aquile, La residenza municipale tra arte e storia* (Palermo 2004), pp. 13–74: 15.

<sup>204</sup> *AE*, pp. 114–15.

<sup>205</sup> *AE*, pp. 155–74.

<sup>206</sup> *AE*, pp. 114–15.

<sup>207</sup> *AE*, p. 115.

the Palermitan Jews,<sup>208</sup> which is well documented at the end of the 15th century; in the environs of Palermo their landed estates extended as far as Falsomiele, Sant'Elia, Favara, Terre Rosse, S. Maria delle Grazie, the Colli area, Scala, Malaspina, Zisa, Margi; the properties of the Palermitan Jews were not only to be found in the city and its immediate vicinity, but included fields and vineyards in Ficarazzi, Termini Imerese, Ciminna, Nicosia, Monreale, Alcamo, and Marsala.<sup>209</sup>

*Community Structures (Synagogue, Ritual Bath,  
Slaughterhouse, Cemetery)*

However, apart from the residential presence concentrated in the Cassaro but extending across a good part of the urban zone, the beating heart of the Jewish community remained for centuries in the Iudaica, around the synagogue, the *miskita Iudeorum*, that is, the area circumscribed by the present-day streets named Ponticello, Calderai, S. Cristoforo e Giardinazzo, in the Albergheria.<sup>210</sup> The very existence of a synagogue indicates an enduring Jewish presence, since no sooner had a group of Jews established itself in a specific site than it would create a place in which to meet and pray, a necessity that prompted its most pressing request to the authorities. At synagogue one met to discuss the circumstances of individual members of the community, to help or to admonish, to lend a hand or to punish. In its premises the division of the taxes levied upon the Jews was decided upon, while the group's officers were chosen and elected. Rather than being a house of prayer the synagogue was therefore the headquarters of the *aljama* (Arabic: *al-jamā'a*) or *universitas Iudeorum*, the term used to refer to every organised Jewish community of any size; the rabbinical court and the court of arbitration of the Jewish community likewise had its headquarters in the synagogue.

News of the existence of synagogues in Palermo could already be gleaned from the letters of Gregory the Great (October 598). Indeed, Bishop Victor had: *synagogas in civitate Panormitana positas cum hospitibus suis fuisse ab eo inrationabiliter occupatas*; we cannot ascertain their exact location, but we know that they were already structures that were lavishly furnished

<sup>208</sup> JS, 1: 131; JS, 1: 185.

<sup>209</sup> Francesco Giunta, Laura Sciascia, "Sui beni patrimoniali degli ebrei di Palermo," in *Gli ebrei in Sicilia sino all'espulsione del 1492*, pp. 175–252: 173.

<sup>210</sup> Lagumina, "Le giudaiche," p. 14 n.1; Salvo Di Matteo, "La giudecca di Palermo dal X al XV secolo," in Romualdo Giuffrida, Aldo Spati, Salvo Di Matteo, eds., *Fonti per la storia dell'espulsione degli ebrei dalla Sicilia* (Palermo, 1992), pp. 61–84: 65, 80, 82.

and connected to *hospitia* and gardens (*cum his hospitiiis quae sub ipsis sunt, vel earum parietibus cohaerent, atque hortis ibi coniunctis... Codices vero vel ornamenta pariter ablata quaeruntur*).<sup>211</sup>

In the Islamic period the first mention of the *keneset*, the synagogue, dates to c. 1020, and emerges from the letter that Abū l-Ḥayy b. Ḥākīm, *av bet din* of Palermo, sent to Ḥananya ha-Kohen in Jerusalem, when seeking to justify a failure to send a sum of money.<sup>212</sup> Another document from the Geniza refers to a “house of prayer” from which the Jews of the city had been driven out (*nigroshenu me-bet tefillatenu*), but the reference itself and the dating of the text are somewhat problematic.<sup>213</sup>

At the beginning of the 12th century there is a mention of the *ekklelesia ton Iudaion*, the synagogue of the Jews, in a dorsal note in Greek on an Arabic parchment belonging to the Charters of Santa Maria della Grotta (before 506/1112).<sup>214</sup> The first topographic information we have on the synagogue comes from a document dated to the year (a. M. 6692) 1184 and not to 1094, as has been repeated, in error, time and time again;<sup>215</sup> it concerns the donation by Eugenius tou Kalou/Abū l-Ṭayyib<sup>216</sup> of a plot to the monastery of Santa Maria della Grotta, and in it the synagogue is situated along the river Kemonia, and abuts on a place called *Phacaer*.<sup>217</sup> The same synagogue also features in a document from 1338, in which Leonus Millac “unius ex syndicis sinagoge Iudeorum Panormi” rented out for

<sup>211</sup> *JS*, 1: 20.

<sup>212</sup> *JS*, 1: 39; Gil, “Sicily,” p. 153.

<sup>213</sup> Ben Sasson, *The Jews*, 3, p. 18, l. 15; *JS*, 1: 50; according to Gil the document may be dated to c. 940, but according to Ben Sasson and Zeldes to 1130–40, see Gil, “Sicily,” pp. 102–13; Nadia Zeldes, “A Geniza Letter Pertaining to the History of Sicilian Jewry in the Muslim Period. A Reevaluation,” *Zion* 35 (1988), 57–64 (in Hebrew).

<sup>214</sup> The parchment, once held to be lost, is preserved at the biblioteca Liciniana in Termini Imerese, Charters of S. Maria della Grotta, A 27; for an edition of the text, see Cusa, 2: pp. 610–13.

<sup>215</sup> The document had already been correctly amended on the basis of the eighteenth-century Latin summary of Giovanni Amato, by Carlo Alberto Garufi, see P. Ioannes Maria Amatus Panormitanus S. J., *Basilianae Abbatiae S. Mariae de Cripta Panormi Monumenta graeca, latina, sicula, italica, ispanica ex privatis, publicis, regisque Tabulis collecta*, ms. della BCP, Qq H 9, ff. 300r–301v; Carlo Alberto Garufi, *I documenti inediti dell'epoca normanna in Sicilia. Parte prima* (Palermo, 1899), n. LXXIX, pp. 195–96, for the analysis of the data, *ibid.*, pp. XXVII–XXIX (to which should be added the *errata-corrige* on p. LII); Gaetano Maria Columba, “Note di topografia medievale palermitana,” *Archivio Storico Siciliano* 35 (1910), 325–47; 336, n. 2; 341 (reconstruction of the text), with an *Appendice* by Carlo Alfonso Nalino, *ibid.*, pp. 348–50.

<sup>216</sup> On this personage see Johns, *Arabic Administration*, pp. 170–71.

<sup>217</sup> On the term *Phachaer* from the Arabic *fakhkhār*, “potter,” and interpreted by S. Cusa as “forecourt of the potter’s workshop,” see De Simone, “Palermo,” p. 174 n. 198; on this passage see also *JS*, 1: 305.

a year to Nicolò Burgisio “chirbam unam ipsius Sinagoge sitam retro et secus eandem Sinagogam ex una parte et iuxta flumen Ballaro ex altera et alios confines totam.”<sup>218</sup> Plainly, the synagogue was situated along the course of the Kemonia/*flumen Ballaro*, at the very same site upon which there arose the building visited by ‘Ovadya of Bertinoro in 1487, of which a magnificent and detailed description has come down to us:

The synagogue (*bet ha-keneset*) in Palermo has no equal in the country and among the nations, and [everybody] praises it. In the outer courtyard grow vines on stone pillars. They have no equal: I measured one vine five palms thick. From there a stone stairway leads to the court before the synagogue, surrounded by a portico on three sides, equipped with chairs for those who do not wish to enter the synagogue for one reason or another. There is a fine and beautiful well. On the fourth side there is the portal of the synagogue. The synagogue is square, forty on forty ells. Toward the east there is the sanctuary (*hekal*), a pretty stone structure like a chapel. Because they will not put the scrolls of the law in an *aron*. Instead they put them in the sanctuary, on a wooden platform, with their housings and crowns on top and silver finials and crystal on the columns. I was told that the silver, crystal and gold embroidery in the sanctuary were worth 4000 gold pieces. The sanctuary has two exits, south and north. Two trustees from among the community are in charge of the doors. In the middle of the synagogue there is a wooden tower, the dais to which the cantors (*hazzanim*) ascend to pray. The community has hired five cantors. They pray on Sabbaths and Holidays with pleasant voices and melodies. I have never seen anything like it among Jews anywhere. But on weekdays few come to synagogue, a boy may count them. There are many rooms [grouped] round the synagogue, such as the room of the hospice with beds for the sick and shelterless foreigners from distant lands; the room of the ritual bath (*lishkat miqweh ha-mayim*); the great and beautiful room of the officers, where they sit in judgment and deliberate on public affairs.<sup>219</sup>

On 6 October 1492 a group of Jews sold the complex of the *miskita Iudeorum* to the noble Cristina Di Salvo; this was a dense estate of houses located in the area between via Calderai and via Giardinaccio, which subsequently Di Salvo donated to suor Lucrezia Di Leo, who founded there a nunnery of poor Clares, later abandoned when the river Kemonia flooded, and occupied from 1582 to 1596 by the Archive of the guild of notaries. In 1606 the friars of the Order of the Augustinians began to build the

<sup>218</sup> *JS*, 2: 527; the Sicilian term *chirba*, from the Arabic *khirba*, should be taken to mean “small garden,” not “ruin,” see G. Caracausi, *Arabismi medievali di Sicilia* (Palermo, 1983), pp. 187–89.

<sup>219</sup> Hebrew text: *From Italy to Jerusalem*, pp. 38–39; translation of *SC*, p. 252; Italian translation: Lagumina, “Le giudaiche,” pp. 16–20.

present-day Church of S. Nicolò da Tolentino, and tradition, borne out by a commemorative epigraph still *in situ*, has it that it was on the site of the old synagogue.<sup>220</sup>

As to the foundation and planimetry of the building, Bartolomeo Lagumina had suggested an Islamic ancestry; this scholar had hypothesised that, after the departure of the Muslims from the city (1160–c. 1220), the Jews of Palermo had occupied the site of the ancient mosque of Ibn Sīqlāb mentioned by Ibn Ḥawqal; the hypothesis, revived in recent studies,<sup>221</sup> has nonetheless turned out to be wholly mistaken: it is more than plausible that the synagogue should have been located in the same quarter and in the same area ever since the Islamic period; as for the obvious Islamic echo in the architecture of the building, it is a well-known fact that the synagogues of Islamic countries draw inspiration from local styles, and the ancient synagogue of Palermo was no exception.

What survives of the synagogue described by ‘Ovadya, or so it would seem, is the well-head with Hebrew inscription and heraldic coats of arms of the house of Aragon (1282–1413), at present housed in the cloister of the Magione but formerly in the church of Santa Maria del Cancelliere.<sup>222</sup>

The existence of only one *miskita* is confirmed by the 15th-century documents which recite *congregatos intus Meskite eorum e constituti intus eorum Iayma seu Muskita*,<sup>223</sup> yet in the year 1269 we have a reference to the existence of another synagogue (*domus Iudeorum*) within the city centre, in an area very far from the Jewish quarter, *in regione Seralcadi*. This reference is to a plot given once again to the monastery of Santa Maria della Grotta, whose boundaries were as follows: *ab oriente est via publica et tenimentum unum domorum Nicolai Corviserii, ab occidente est*

<sup>220</sup> ASP, Notaio Domenico De Leo, 1, c. 110; on the events surrounding this area, see Lagumina, “Le giudaiche,” pp. 16–17 n. 1; Nino Basile, “La Moschita, il Giardinaccio, la Guzzetta, l’Ospedaletto,” in *Palermo felicissima. Divagazioni d’arte e di storia*, ed. Rosario La Duca, 3 vols. (Palermo, 1978), 3: pp. 185–93; Francesco Vergara, “La contrada della Moschita: primi risultati di un’indagine sul sito dell’Archivio Storico Comunale di Palermo,” in *Palermo e la sua Provincia. Gli archivi per la storia del territorio, Atti del Convegno (Palermo, P.zzo Butera, 19–20 dicembre 1994)*, Gli archivi non statali in Sicilia, Studi e ricerche, 3 (Palermo, 1998), pp. 45–57.

<sup>221</sup> David Cassuto, “La Meschita di Palermo,” in *Architettura judaica in Italia: ebraismo, sito, memoria dei luoghi* (Palermo, 1994), pp. 29–39: 36; Nicolò Bucaria and David Cassuto, “La sinagoga e i *miqweh* di Palermo alla luce dei documenti e delle scoperte archeologiche,” *Archivio storico siciliano* s. IV, XXXI (2005), 171–209: 189–92.

<sup>222</sup> Bucaria, Cassuto, “La sinagoga,” pp. 189–90.

<sup>223</sup> JS, 9: p. 5805; 10: p. 6383; *congregati intus Miskitam Sinagoge Iudeorum*, 11: p. 6916; *in loco solito congregatorum, ut moris est*, 12: p. 7669.

*Synagoga et domus Iudeorum*.<sup>224</sup> The presence of a synagogue in an area, distinct and separate, and largely depopulated since the departure of the Muslims, fits perfectly with the arrival in Palermo of the Jews of the Garbo (1239), who were in open dispute with the local community and asked to be allowed to build a synagogue of their own (Frederick II prohibited construction from scratch, but suggested that they set about rebuilding a ruined or abandoned structure).<sup>225</sup>

As is evident from 'Ovadya's description the ritual bath (*miqweh ha-mayim*) was attached to the synagogue.<sup>226</sup> Recently a second ritual bath has been identified, purportedly dating from "Late Antiquity," in the courtyard of the present-day Biblioteca Comunale, in the area of the Casa Professa, but one should take full account of the harsh criticisms voiced against this hypothesis.

The Jewish slaughterhouse, the *macellus Iudeorum* or *buchiria Iudeorum*, was from the 14th century once again in the vicinity of the synagogue, on the northern side of the great courtyard of the Meschita, looking out on to via Calderai, and it discharged the blood into the river Kemonia.<sup>227</sup> In 1312 in Palermo a clear distinction was made between the butchers of the Jews and those of the Christians, since they were taxed in a different way (the former came under the *cabella fumi*, the second under the *bucheria*).<sup>228</sup> At the beginning of the 15th century the Palermitan Jews were given permission to prepare and salt meat in the Christians' own slaughterhouses;<sup>229</sup> in 1426 a proclamation, soon annulled, banned the selling to Christians of meat butchered by Jews, and imposed the red circle on those slaughterhouses in which Jewish meat was sold.<sup>230</sup> The separation between Jewish and Christian slaughterhouses, and the imposition of the badge, along with heavy penalties for those who transgressed, was ratified by

<sup>224</sup> Amatus, *Basilianae Abbatiae S. Mariae de Cripta*, Qq H 9, ff. 334r–334v; Di Giovanni, *La topografia*, 2: pp. 109–110.

<sup>225</sup> For a different—and far from persuasive—attempt to establish the precise location of the synagogue of the Jews of the Garbo, see Cassuto, "La Meschita," p. 39 n. 11; Bucaria, Cassuto, "La sinagoga," pp. 172, 182–83, 193.

<sup>226</sup> Bucaria, Cassuto, "La sinagoga," pp. 193–200; Mauro Perani, "Alla ricerca del *miqweh* perduto di Palermo: come trasformare un'ipotesi in una scoperta," *Materia giudaica* XIII, 1–2 (2008), 385–96.

<sup>227</sup> *JS*, 2: 342, 643; Di Matteo, "La giudecca," pp. 69–70; *AE*, p. 119; Michele Luzzati, "Carne cristiana e carne ebraica: la *bocciaria* della *giudaica* di Palermo," in *Ebrei e Sicilia*, pp. 135–37.

<sup>228</sup> *JS*, 2: 342.

<sup>229</sup> *JS*, 3: 1729, 1858.

<sup>230</sup> *JS*, 4: 2203.

Alfonso in 1435–36<sup>231</sup> and persisted up until the expulsion; the breakdown in the established patterns of balanced coexistence would seem to have been due to the militant preaching of the Franciscan Matteo of Agrigento and of the Dominican Pietro Geremia, both active between the 1420s and the 1430s.<sup>232</sup>

The synagogue complex also housed the *chabora Iudayce*, the confraternity of gravediggers;<sup>233</sup> the existence of a Jewish cemetery, spared by the confiscations, was already documented in the Islamic period in a letter from the Geniza (after 1035).<sup>234</sup> In the late Middle Ages the cemetery of Palermo was located in the vicinity of the gardens of the Magione and of the orchards of messer Nardo de Lampiso and of Giovanni de Mansono, outside porta Termini, opposite the carbon warehouse, in the vicinity of the present-day railway station; its position close to one of the most heavily used gates, near to the countryside, gave rise to conflicts and displays of high-handedness.<sup>235</sup> The site is marked on the *Pianta geometrica della città di Palermo* published by the Marquis of Villabianca in 1777: at no. 188 the “Sepolcri de’ Giudei fuori di Porta di Termine” are indicated. A tombstone dated to 1472 and now lost, incorporated into the wall of a tower from palazzo Pizzuto in via Bandiera, was originally from the Jewish cemetery.<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> *JS*, 4: 2432; 2440.

<sup>232</sup> Krasner, “Re, regine,” p. 75.

<sup>233</sup> *JS*, 5: 2820.

<sup>234</sup> *JS*, 1: 57.

<sup>235</sup> *AE*, pp. 118–119.

<sup>236</sup> Benedetto Rocco, “Note su una lapide medievale di Palermo,” *Sefer Yuhasin* 8 (1992),





## CONCLUSIVE PERSPECTIVES



## CITIZENS AND FREEDOM IN MEDIEVAL SICILY

Fabrizio Titone

The historiographical debate regarding medieval Sicily, especially in its urban dimension, includes studies which are markedly anachronistic and/or teleological in approach. Thus, in recent years Robert Putnam has posited a strong link between the economic and political outcomes in present-day southern Italy and presumed balances in the Middle Ages. We are given to believe that either the Norman or the Swabian period saw the triumph of a highly centralized, authoritarian monarchy, consolidated during the domination of the Angevins and the Aragonese, hostile to any civic involvement in the institutional sphere.<sup>1</sup> The consequence was, according to this view, the destruction of any form of civic participation, a reality diametrically opposed to that of the communes in central and northern Italy, where the social and political involvement of citizens is supposed to have laid the foundations for the gradual and notable economic development of those areas. The starkly dichotomous claim is then made that “in the North the people were citizens; in the South they were subject.”<sup>2</sup>

In marked contrast to such speculative reconstructions, the present paper argues that in the later Middle Ages in Sicily there was considerable scope for independent civic activity and for the involvement of local communities in government policy.<sup>3</sup> At the same time I refute the thesis of a

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<sup>1</sup> Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton, 1993), in particular for the medieval period, pp. 121–37.

<sup>2</sup> Putnam, *Making*, p. 130.

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that the historiographical paradigm denying the existence of cities with the capacity to play an important political role long predates Putnam's study. Indeed, this same paradigm features in studies of real scope and ambition, see Henri Bresc, *Un monde méditerranéen. Économie et société en Sicile 1300–1450* (Rome-Palermo, 1986), which is noteworthy for, amongst other things, its remarkable analysis of notarial records. I would further add that Bresc's analysis has served as a foundation for new and original lines of enquiry. In particular, Stephan Epstein, *An island for itself: economic development and social change in late medieval Sicily* (Cambridge, 1992), a study which, though at odds with Bresc, draws inspiration from many pages in his writings. A reappraisal of the urban dimension may be found in Fabrizio Titone, *Governments of the universitates. Urban communities of Sicily in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries* (Turnhout, 2009). For a revision of the interpretation claiming that the Norman conquest did not allow self-governance in the

repressive royal authority, and that of seigneurial powers that were invariably preponderant and the sole interlocutors of the crown. The present essay is divided into two linked parts, each arising out of two distinct analytic approaches. The first part presents a general account of the urban communities on the island, highlighting their autonomy and the forms assumed by their confrontation with the Crown. The second part corroborates this demonstration through the study of a specific case, endorsing the well-known assertion of Thomas Bisson that “the history of power is to be sought in its microcosms, its locales.”<sup>4</sup>

FROM THE VESPERS TO THE VICE-KINGDOM:  
A CHRONOLOGICAL SURVEY

As is well-known, the anti-Angevin revolt of the Vespers erupted in Palermo on 31 March 1282. On 4 September Peter of Aragon was elected king of Sicily in Palermo by the representatives of the *universitates*, that is to say, the juridically recognized communities. Peter III decreed a separation between the two Crowns, reserving the Iberian succession for his son Alfonso, and the Sicilian succession for his second-born, James, who became King of Sicily in 1286. Alfonso III, who died in 1291, endorsed the separation of the Crowns, appointing as his own successor James II, and as King of the island of Sicily his youngest brother, Frederick. In 1291, however, James II assumed both Crowns and returned to Aragon. In 1295, through the ratification of the Treaty of Anagni, James II renounced Sicily in favour of the Angevins. On 15 January 1296, at the Parliament of Catania, Frederick was elected King of Sicily, reigning as Frederick III.

In 1377, the year of Frederick IV's death, the government of the Kingdom was entrusted, at the King's behest, to Artale I Alagona, reigning as Vicar alongside Queen Maria. Alagona preferred to share power with the other major barons of equal rank, namely, Manfredi III Chiaromonte, Francesco II Ventimiglia and Guglielmo Peralta. The interregnum was brought to an end by Peter IV of Aragon, who identified in the Infant Martin, son of his own second-born, the Duke of Montblanch, the solution, by way of marriage to Maria, daughter of Frederick IV. Following on from the death of

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cities, see Paul Oldfield, *City and community in Norman Italy* (Cambridge 2009). Oldfield focuses on Campania and Apulia.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas N. Bisson, *Conclusion*, in *Cultures of power: lordship, status, and process in twelfth-century Europe* (Philadelphia, 1995), p. 331.

Peter in 1387, Martin of Montblanch became the author of the conquest begun in 1392 with the crowning of his son as Martin I, King of Sicily.

In 1409, Martin I died, and according to the terms of his will the Sicilian throne passed to Martin, King of Aragon. Martin of Aragon died in 1410, and through the Compromise of Caspe of 1412 the Regent of Castile, Ferdinando de Antequera of Trastámara, was elected to the Aragonese throne. The institution of the Vice-Kingdom, which took shape through the election of Alfonso V, in 1416, gradually took hold in Sicily. Alfonso decided that at his death his brother John II (1458–1479) would rule over the Iberian kingdoms and Sicily, while the Kingdom of Naples would be separated off from the Aragonese crown and entrusted to Ferrante, the illegitimate son of Alfonso V.

The Aragonese settlement became more localized, as the Norman-Swabian dispensation, which had hinged upon central offices, receded into the past, and at the same time a confrontation between king and country, though not of a top-down kind, took shape. Peter III swiftly went ahead with the ratification of urban elections and with the appointment of royal magistrates responsible for the localities. The decision to proceed with the formal recognition of elective offices should not be seen as the advent of a new political direction—there are in fact many indications of similar practices in the Angevin period—but it does imply a concern on the part of the *universitates* (communities) to lose no time in consolidating and even extending their own role.

So far as the aftermath of the Vespers and then the reign itself of Frederick III (1296–1337) are concerned, there is evidence for intense dynamism at the local level and for broad urban participation in government policy. In this regard I would draw the reader's attention to certain crucial facts. The first has to do with the *universitates* of Palermo and Corleone, which, in the aftermath of the Vespers, embarked upon a project of interest as much for the economic choices taken, namely, fiscal exemption for *cives* in both urban centres, as for the references to the officials and leading citizens (*probi viri*) responsible for underwriting this same project.<sup>5</sup> The two communities, by facilitating commercial exchanges, sought to respond to rising economic demand. The *probi viri* may be defined as those prominent citizens who, though not forming part of the class of

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<sup>5</sup> Raffaele Starrabba, Luigi Tirrito, eds., *Assise et consuetudini della terra di Corleone* (Palermo, 1880), pp. 129–33.

magistrates, participated in government activities and were promoters of the accord between the cities, such activities implying that it was their custom to be unreservedly involved in political debate. In general, the understanding between these two *universitates* points to a fact that would seem to be clearly borne out by the primary sources, not merely in Palermo and Corleone but extending in the following years to many other centres, namely, the prominence of merchants and businessmen in the urban context.

In addition to the aspects of city life considered above, I will now present some information exemplifying a general tendency relating to electoral procedure and the process of scripturation. The evidence from city elections shows that both officials and others took part in the electoral college. For instance, Peter III's interventions in elections were addressed to the *universis hominibus* of the *universitas*, and in certain cases they included some officials.<sup>6</sup> We are concerned here with features that became more widespread and more pronounced during the reign of Frederick III. I will simply recall Frederick's request, in 1304, to the *Baiulis*, the Judges and the *hominibus* (that is to say, men outside the group of officials) of the *universitates*, that they send to his brother James of Aragon their own syndics, whose election he requests, in order that they swear an oath on the occasion of the signing of *pactes et convenciones*. Where these elections were concerned, we know that the *universitates* of Syracuse, Trapani, Palermo and Messina shared the following: the custom of assembling in a consecrated site (a parish church, the cathedral, the mother church), the reading in the presence of those gathered together of the royal decree, the election by the assembly of representatives upon whom a mandate was then conferred.<sup>7</sup> It was thus the custom for the communities to assemble and elect their own representatives. We are dealing here with developments which in my opinion constitute the first steps towards, or more probably the revival of an earlier reality, the formation of a civic council, that is to say, an organ of government, consisting of a number of officials and of some other members of the community, entrusted with the task of intervening in out-of-the-ordinary political contexts, when a somewhat broader consultation was required.

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<sup>6</sup> *De Rebus Regni Siciliae. Documenti inediti estratti dall'Archivio della Corona d'Aragona* (1882, reprinted in Palermo 1982), 1: 48–49, pp. 71–73, p. 148, p. 1282.

<sup>7</sup> Laura Sciascia, ed., *Pergamene siciliane dell'Archivio della Corona d'Aragona (1188–1347)* (Palermo, 1994), pp. 124–35.

The collections of customary texts represent further proof of the economic and social dynamism of the Sicilian cities in these years. The strong correlation between the distribution of customary texts and, in particular, a Frederickian royal policy which was in many respects unprecedented, was the consequence of a general ferment in the urban world. The customary texts consist of reworkings of earlier drafts, recast in the light of current realities,<sup>8</sup> nor are they the only important sources for those years. Illuminato Peri, surely the greatest Sicilian medievalist, showed rare historical acumen and investigative tenacity in exploring the island's rich local sources. Thus, in one of his most important essays, published in 1956 and based entirely on an ecclesiastical archive, Peri brought to light primary sources testifying to the economic dynamism of a *clericus mercator* active in Polizzi between the end of the 13th and the beginning of the 14th century.<sup>9</sup> The highly vibrant economic circuit which he did so much to reconstruct lends credence to the view that the ferment of these years was also evident in the cities situated further inland. Peri used this previously unknown documentary series to develop truly remarkable lines of enquiry. The case of Polizzi was by no means unique, and in this regard we should bear in mind the important primary sources held in the *Archivio Capitolare* of Santa Maria Maggiore in Nicosia, a fundamental source, beginning in the mid-13th century, for any scholar seeking to reconstruct the history of that community.<sup>10</sup> It should further be borne in mind that the 13th century was of crucial importance in the consolidation of relations between Tuscany and Sicily, since Tuscan immigrants present on the island played a clearly mercantile social role.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Illuminato Peri, *La Sicilia dopo il Vespro. Uomini, città e campagne. 1282/1376* (Rome and Bari, 1990), pp. 20–21. More broadly, see Ennio I. Mineo, "Norme cittadine, sviluppo istituzionale, dinamica sociale: sulla scritturazione consuetudinaria in Sicilia tra XIII e XIV secolo," in Gabriella Rossetti, ed., *Legislazione e prassi istituzionale nell'Europa medievale. Tradizione normativa, ordinamenti, circolazione mercantile (secoli XI–XV)* (Naples, 2001), pp. 383–99. Regarding the vibrancy of urban society in the reign of Frederick III see Peri, *La Sicilia*, p. 19–20; Giuseppe Petralia, "Sui Toscani in Sicilia tra Due e Trecento: la penetrazione sociale e il radicamento nei ceti urbani," in Marco Tangheroni, ed., *Commercio, finanza, funzione pubblica. Stranieri in Sicilia e Sardegna nei secoli XIII–XV* (Naples, 1989), pp. 136–85.

<sup>9</sup> Illuminato Peri, *Rinaldo di Giovanni Lombardo "habitor terre Policii"* (Palermo, 1956), in Id., *Villani e cavalieri nella Sicilia Medievale* (Rome-Bari, 1993), pp. 143–95.

<sup>10</sup> I refer here to the *Libro di Santa Maria delle Grazie* of Nicosia. Barbato published several important documents from this source, see Angelo Barbato, *Per la storia di Nicosia nel medio evo. Documenti inediti (1267–1454)* (Nicosia, 1919). The first primary sources republished dates from 1267, and then from 1305 onwards pp. 21–22ff.

<sup>11</sup> Giuseppe Petralia, "Sui Toscani in Sicilia fra Due e Trecento," pp. 129–218.



The process of scripturation at the local level represents a general phenomenon in the medieval, and especially in the late medieval period,<sup>12</sup> and in Sicily we are struck by its sheer variety. I refer in particular to the precious city *Libri* (the names of such books may vary), which are still in large part unread and which constitute texts of signal importance. In the majority of cases such texts indicate that the 14th century was a phase in which the cities underwent expansion. In general, the communities' call to undertake the drafting of a communal memoir, that is, a memoir relating to the community, through the recording of the most important privileges and of the events most relevant to the majority, reveals the degree to which the Sicilian cities may be regarded as sites for the production of writing.<sup>13</sup> It is worth noting that, in the case of the *universitas* of Piazza, an actual urban memoir, entitled *Consuetudines terre Platee*, has survived. Note that non-episcopal centres were called *terrae*, while episcopal centres were dubbed *civitates*. In 1309 a start was made to the scripturation of the collection, which was expanded in the following centuries, and constitutes an example of the building-up of a communal memory.<sup>14</sup> It is worth stressing the fact that the title *Consuetudines* was given to the whole text, consisting in its first part of genuine customs and in the rest chiefly of royal privileges, with the most space being taken up with primary sources from the early 14th century to the beginning of the 16th century. This text supplies important evidence for the manner in which social structures were then articulated, for the institutional experiments which were undertaken, for political conflicts and for confrontations with central government, as also for a self-promoting urban rhetoric.

There are plainly many elements in the historical record serving to confirm that economic and institutional growth in the urban context was a widespread phenomenon, evident from the early years of the 14th century and symptomatic of political arenas undergoing a process of expansion.

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<sup>12</sup> Paolo Cammarosano, *Italia medievale. Struttura e geografia delle fonti scritte* (Rome, 1991).

<sup>13</sup> For the purposes of comparison see also Sarah Rees Jones, "Cities and their saints in England, circa 1150–1300: the development of bourgeois values in the cults of Saint William of York and Saint Kenelm of Winchcombe," in Caroline Goodson, Anne E. Lester and Carol Symes, eds., *Cities, texts and social networks, 400–1500. Experience and perceptions of medieval urban space* (Farnham, 2010), pp. 193–213, on the interaction between social networks, texts and topography in the urban milieu.

<sup>14</sup> Biblioteca comunale di Piazza Armerina, *Consuetudines terre Platee*.

## INSTITUTIONAL DIVERSITIES AND ECONOMIC POLICY

The election of Frederick III was wholly consonant with the desires of the Swabian political class for greater independence, and from then on the *universitates* had the opportunity significantly to consolidate their own role. It is worth considering the impact of these shifting political balances upon the institutional context. The existence of institutional homogeneity at times has been argued for on the basis of the elections of the *Baiulus*, Judge and Jurat since the late 13th century,<sup>15</sup> at times in terms of the presence of homogeneous institutions in a local context from the first half of the 14th century onwards,<sup>16</sup> and at times, more generally, in relation to the election of magistrates.<sup>17</sup> The primary sources do, however, oblige us to make many distinctions. In the first instance the evidence suggests that up until the end of the 14th century there subsisted a great diversity both in the presence of elected offices—some to be found in some centres but not in others—and in the procedures used to confer the magistracies. What is particularly striking is the active role played by society in modifying or consolidating offices of government, which were therefore not viewed as unalterable realities.

In the first half of the 14th century the main elective system for urban officials, namely, the scrutiny (*scrutineum*) represented one of the most important prerogatives of the city-dweller, and one that was very widespread. However, it was not the only electoral system, since some urban offices were allocated by means of other procedures: for example, in 1356 the *universitas* of Mineo elected the public Notary *unanimiter et concorditer*, while in 1357 the *universitas* of Polizzi, assembled *in unum*, chose the Notary for the Curia civile.<sup>18</sup> In Catania the scrutiny system would seem

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<sup>15</sup> Pietro Corrao, "Fra città e corte. Circolazione dei ceti dirigenti nel Regno di Sicilia fra Trecento e Quattrocento," in Andrea Romano, ed., *Istituzioni politiche e giuridiche e strutture del potere politico ed economico nelle città dell'Europa mediterranea medievale e moderna. La Sicilia* (Messina, 1992), p. 26; Id., "Assemblee municipali nella Sicilia tardo-medievale note sul caso maltese," in Paul Xuereb, ed., *Karissime Gotifride* (Malta, 1999), p. 37.

<sup>16</sup> Id., "Città ed élites urbane nella Sicilia del Tre-Quattrocento," *Revista d'Història Medieval* 9 (1998), pp. 176–77.

<sup>17</sup> Id., "Negoziare la politica: i 'capitula impetrata' dalle comunità del regno siciliano nel XV secolo," in Cecilia Nubola and Andreas Würzler, eds., *Forme della comunicazione politica in Europa nei secoli XV–XVIII. Suppliche, gravamina, lettere* (Bologna-Berlin, 2004), p. 119.

<sup>18</sup> Giuseppe Cosentino, *Codice diplomatico di Federico III d'Aragona re di Sicilia* (Palermo, 1866), p. 185, p. 387.

not to have been put on a firm footing before the beginning of the 15th century.<sup>19</sup>

A study of the lists of the officials elected by scrutiny, together with a comparison between the prerogatives of these same magistrates in various different centres, indicates both a high degree of diversity in the structures of government in the various urban communities, and shifts in the magistrates' prerogatives over time.

The differences in the organizational structure of the elected officials and/or their privileges were essentially the result of several factors that became clear during the course of the 1300s. The existence of certain offices and not others reflects various social contexts that gave rise to different requirements. Some communities failed to consolidate royal concessions, while others, on account of their more important economic role, had more leeway in their negotiations with the King. The primary sources from the first half of the 14th century fully bears out these points. Consider, for example, Frederick IV's royal mandates regarding electoral procedures, mandates which drew their inspiration from an older reality, and which showed how it was that not all offices with a responsibility for civil administration were chosen by scrutiny. In the instructions drawn up for the use of the royal official charged with overseeing the conduct of the elections, we find reproduced, among other things, the list of the offices to which electoral competition would apply. It is worth reproducing the information relating to the *Baiuli*: "The *Baiuli* in those cities and *terre* where the custom is to appoint them through scrutiny."<sup>20</sup>

The *Baiulus*—who, in some centres, was one of the main officials in the civil administration—was therefore not chosen by scrutiny everywhere, and this was by no means of secondary importance given the fact that this was a practice destined to become more entrenched. Where he was not elected by scrutiny, he did not play a pre-eminent role in government, and he is known to have had different prerogatives from those he had in centres in which he was chosen by scrutiny.<sup>21</sup> In general, during

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<sup>19</sup> Fabrizio Titone, *I magistrati cittadini. Gli ufficiali scrutinati in Sicilia da Martino I ad Alfonso V* (Caltanissetta-Rome, 2008), p. 179.

<sup>20</sup> *Baiulos in illis ex eisdem civitatibus et terris ubi creari per modum scrutinii extitit hactenus consuetum*, Cosentino, *Codice*, p. 166, 1356.

<sup>21</sup> Luigi Genuardi, *Il Comune nel medio evo in Sicilia. Contributo alla storia del diritto amministrativo* (Palermo, 1921), p. 194, was the first to note the absence of the *Baiulus* in certain centres, advancing a working hypothesis that the present writer has refuted, see Titone, *Governments*, p. 32 note 99.

the reign of Frederick IV, as in later phases, if we compare the list of the officers published in the royal directives for the elections with what actually emerges through electoral practices, we find a discrepancy arising not only as regards the post of *Baiulus* but relating to other offices also. If some offices were not decided by means of scrutiny, this does not necessarily mean that they were not operative: in some cases they may have been present and appointed locally through other modes of election, at any rate in some periods.<sup>22</sup>

Institutional development, apart from being a response to confrontation and to the existing room for manoeuvre between King and city, arose out of the various demands articulated at the local level. I will simply cite, albeit in relation to a later phase, the case of the *universitas* of Castoreale, which, in 1409, did not appoint anyone to the office of Treasurer, since his responsibilities were shouldered by other officials, and the community in that period had other, more urgent priorities to address.<sup>23</sup>

The study of financial and fiscal policy suggests other areas in which the cities enjoyed more room for manoeuvre. The taxation system consisted principally of a collection of indirect taxes (*gabelle*), the supposition being that the communities in the first half of the 14th century had a reduced freedom to introduce them. Already in Frederick III's reign a differentiation became apparent between imposts which were under the control of central government and those pertaining to local government, in part a legacy of balances prevailing in the Angevin period. As regards the distinction between royal and local *gabelle*, it is evident that the administrator of taxable property was not immutable, and this is how we should interpret the royal concessions to the communities of specific imposts, which might subsequently be clawed back by the King. It could also happen that a part of a tax was owed by the community and a part by the Crown. Such shifts in ownership allow us to establish one of the principal features—more pronounced still in later years—of the system of taxation, namely, the lack of any rigid control over the *gabelle*. Nonetheless, even if temporary, the differentiation of the control over taxation is clearly defined, and borne out by the actual concessions on the taxes. This was not a secondary aspect but a matter of the utmost importance: the King ceded to the cities control over a part of the urban income, and

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<sup>22</sup> Titone, *Governments*, pp. 49–76.

<sup>23</sup> Salvatore Giambruno-Luigi Genuardi, *Capitoli inediti delle città demaniali di Sicilia* (Palermo, 1918), p. 121.

in fact precious margins of autonomy were at stake, which enabled city-dwellers to achieve enrichment at the local level. The first half of the 14th century, rather than the first half of the 15th century, was the initial phase in the constitution of a local fiscality.<sup>24</sup>

The separation between royal and urban income became more apparent during the reign of Frederick IV. The maintenance of this taxation system was fundamental to the understanding built up between the Crown and the local elites. It was not by chance that amongst the King's first interventions on behalf of those communities that had returned to the demesne, if, that is, they had at one time come under the control of rebel magnates, one provided for the reinstatement of the previous imposts.<sup>25</sup>

Where cities' needs were greater, the existing *gabelle* might not be sufficient, and then the *universitas*, once it had obtained royal authorization, could impose new taxes. Furthermore, in the case of unanticipated needs it was not uncommon for the *universitas* to have recourse to a form of direct taxation, and there is documentary evidence of a community indicating its preference for this kind of tax, though it was up to the Crown to decide how the contributions were to be made. There are no shortage of cases, between the 1330s and the 1350s, of direct taxes assessed in terms of the ability of the different inhabitants to pay.<sup>26</sup>

The surviving documentation indicates that from the early 14th century onwards indirect taxes were the principal fiscal item, but from the third decade urban governments often had recourse to direct taxes, even if in particular and unusual circumstances. Indeed, by the mid-14th century the foundations of financial and fiscal policy had been laid, and these would be significantly consolidated from the end of the 14th century onwards.

#### THE GOVERNMENT OF THE VICARS AND ROYAL RESTORATION

The particular strength of the urban communities lay in their capacity to take advantage of a vast economic circuit guaranteed by the role of coordinator assumed by the King. It is not surprising that the highest demographic concentration was to be found in demesne communities.

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<sup>24</sup> A different line of argument has been advanced by Corrao, "Negoziare," p. 129, who, referring to some city petitions, maintains that a local fiscal dispensation, distinct from the regal, had its origins in the first half of the 15th century.

<sup>25</sup> R. C., vol. 8, fol. 86r, 1376 (Francavilla).

<sup>26</sup> Titone, *Governments*, pp. 38–39.

Midway through the 14th century the existing economic and political balances underwent a significant shift. In short, from the third and fourth decades of the 14th century there are signs of a profound economic crisis which persists up until the early 15th century, due, as in the other European countries, to the decline in seigneurial revenues. This crisis led to a civil war within the aristocracy, from the 1330s to the early 1360s, which inflicted terrible economic damage and brought about the collapse of the system of exchanges on the island.<sup>27</sup> The vast territorial dimensions of the seigneurial lordships affected by the crisis in seigneurial revenues inevitably caused a polarization in the clash between Crown and magnates. The most prominent representatives of the aristocratic front began to extend their control over the demesne, and in a short time the entire region fell under their sway.

The phase of government by the Vicars or great magnates, which lasted from 1377 to 1392, remains little known, on account of a documentary void probably caused by a deliberate dispersion of records during the royal restoration and by a fall in production in those same years. In another context I have, however, tried to delineate some characteristics of the local governments during the Age of the Vicars, on the basis, in particular, of references to be found in the primary sources from the phase immediately succeeding the royal restoration and initiated by Martin I, King of Sicily, from 1392 onwards. What emerges is not an annulment of urban prerogatives but a sharp reduction in the leeway available for political participation, with the crystallization of a form of centralized government, entailing, in particular, a consolidation of the prerogatives of the captain, that is to say, the official ordinarily responsible for criminal jurisdiction and, in the demesne context, appointed by the King. The factors which in the Age of the Vicars would seem to have inflicted the most humiliation upon the *cives* and the *habitatores* consisted of a crisis in the distribution of prerogatives among the urban officials, and of a seigneurial intervention of an authoritarian kind in urban politics, with the urban taxes coming wholly under the control of members of seigneurial dynasties.<sup>28</sup>

During the royal restoration under way from 1392 onwards the *universitates* immediately set about reclaiming the margins of autonomy previously available to them. The strategy adopted by the cities was to present

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<sup>27</sup> On these aspects of the question I refer the reader to some important pages in Epstein, *An island*, pp. 315–22.

<sup>28</sup> Titone, *Governments*, pp. 41–48.

the King with more and more citizens' petitions (*capitula*), drafted after intensive debate within the community. The incorporation of Sicily into the Aragonese crown led to the widespread circulation of cultural models, amongst them the pactist model of Catalan origin. An important institutional expression of pactist politics was parliamentary activity. In the reign of Martin I a parliamentary representative institution of Catalan provenance took hold, although the division into branches, ecclesiastical, military (holders of fiefs, directly granted by the king) and demesrial, stemmed from the Parliament of 1446. The functioning of this institution was based upon a solid royal *potestas* capable of coordinating, and interacting with, the various political subjects. As in the other territories under the Crown of Aragon, so too in Sicily parliamentary activity was of particular importance since it was in the Parliament that the *donativum* (a financial contribution) was voted, in exchange for the royal approval of petitions.

Nonetheless, Parliament was not the sole context for negotiations, as is shown by, for example, the production of urban petitions. The 14th century processes of negotiation between King and city—including, for example, the procedures by which communities chose representatives to confer with the King—laid the foundations for an important political maturation. The custom implicit in these practices of negotiation would have enabled the *universitates* to exploit from the outset the margins of manoeuvre available in Parliament and at other levels of government from the reign of Martin onwards. The period extending from the installation of King Martin, Infant of Aragon, to the first years of Martin the Magnanimous, has been read as a unitary and autonomous chronological bloc, in which the fundamental turning-points of late medieval Sicilian history would be located.<sup>29</sup> The surviving primary sources does, however, reveal strong elements of continuity with the previous phases. For example, the data examined in this context indicate that both the urban petitions and the petitions accompanying the voting of the *donativum* should be viewed in the light of a well-established and venerable contractual relationship between king and country. The slow and gradual institutional development clearly traceable in primary sources from the early 14th century enabled the *universitates* from the reign of Martin I onwards to exploit the possibility of recovering and consolidating a role undermined by the Vicars.

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<sup>29</sup> Pietro Corrao, *Governare un regno. Potere, società e istituzioni in Sicilia fra Trecento e Quattrocento* (Naples, 1991), p. 27.

## ALFONSO V AND THE CITIES

Where the reign of Alfonso V is concerned, I wish to restrict my discussion to two linked contexts, namely, royal economic policy in the localities and the forms of negotiation between King and city. Alfonso V's economic policy represents a topic of particular interest for anyone seeking to clarify the forms of confrontation between King and *universitates*. I shall refer to the system for the alienation of demesne properties, including the offices and even the communities themselves, because they seem to have involved a radical retraction of urban liberties.

Circumstances in which communities were sold reflect balances of power quite at variance with those existing in the second half of the 14th century, when seigneurial authority had been in the ascendant. Where 15th century sales are concerned, the *dominus* (overlord) exercised only a temporary control and could not interfere with the choices of the *universitas* when this latter entered into negotiations of its own accord with the King with a view to returning to the demesne. The community was at liberty to redeem itself once it was economically capable of making the payment. The interest felt in reincorporation into the demesne was linked, in my view, to its huge size and hence to the economic returns guaranteed by an extensive economic circuit. In order to grasp how drastically curtailed were the possibilities for urban growth within the restricted feudal territories, one simply has to reflect upon the propensity of many communities to extend their own control over the economic resources of the surrounding territories.

It is worth recalling briefly some aspects of the contracts entered into by the King or Viceroy, on the one hand, and by the community, on the other, both generally and during the phases of redemption in particular. The first point to stress is the fact that the substantial sums needed to free oneself from feudal control were in many cases less than the initial sums owed. In other words, a series of reductions and delays in dates of payment were obtained, along with various economic benefits. Furthermore, in the case of the medium-sized and smaller communities, the object of such sales, one can argue that the most significant extension in their room for manoeuvre occurred precisely once the redemption had been effected. The King was passing through a decidedly weak political phase occasioned in fact by his having chosen selling-off even though it was in breach of urban privileges, and consequently needed to re-establish a consensus recently placed in doubt.



There were many cases in which the King had granted privileges and then failed to respect them, in particular privileges precluding the subsequent sale of the communities. It is important to ponder the failure to implement concessions following both petitions submitted individually by the communities and petitions put before Parliament. Beatrice Pasciuta has considered cases of the King failing to respect concessions in Parliament to be proof of the inefficacy of parliamentary contracting, arguing instead that “a genuine, concrete politics [is] the sort effected by means of specific acts, such as concessions *ad personam*, privileges and urban petitions.”<sup>30</sup>

One should nonetheless specify that a reading of the primary sources over a long period, and the comparison of discrete documentary series, reveals that the failure to implement concessions may frequently also involve concessions *ad personam* and those resulting from urban petitions. In addition, where urban petitions are concerned, it is not plausible simply to treat royal approval of a petition<sup>31</sup> as proof of the actual attainment of what had been requested. Such an assumption would be especially implausible in urban contexts in which the balance of forces was liable to alter, rendering previous petitions and their approval redundant and no longer backed by the parties in the majority. Nonetheless, in my opinion facts of this kind are very far from constituting proof that negotiation was by and large ineffectual.

I would further emphasise that one cannot argue for the efficacy of negotiations, in Parliament or in other spheres of government, simply by equating concession and respect for the same. In imagining an equation of this sort we risk giving a misleadingly precise account of what was in actual fact a highly fluid confrontation, one in which there were many factors determining the upholding or otherwise of the concessions. The same holds true of the confrontation between King and country in the other territories under the Crown of Aragon.<sup>32</sup> For instance, in the

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<sup>30</sup> Beatrice Pasciuta, *Placet regie maiestati. Itinerari della normazione nel tardo medioevo* (Turin, 2005), pp. 208–250 (the quotation is at p. 247).

<sup>31</sup> Pietro Corrao, for example, when referring to certain urban petitions approved by the king, maintains that in the second half of Alfonso's reign access to the government was restricted to certain groups (Corrao, “Negoziare,” p. 127). In reality, through further reading of the available primary sources it emerges that a policy of inclusiveness was maintained, save in rare cases in relation to specific offices and only for short periods, throughout the reign of Alfonso V.

<sup>32</sup> Luís García de Valdeavellano, *Curso de Historia de las Instituciones españolas. De los orígenes al final de la Edad Media* (Madrid, 1968), pp. 480–81, pp. 571–79; Sylvia Romeu, *Les Corts valencianes* (Valencia, 1985), pp. 138–40; Coral Cuadrada Majó, “Els greuges dels

Aragonese, Valencian and Catalan *Cortes*, the “branches” would first of all ask that judgement be passed on the *greuges* or *agravios*, that is, those acts of the king or of public officials that had violated the juridical system then in force. This example offers incontrovertible proof of the fact that a royal policy that is not of a top-down kind makes possible constant supervision of royal activity by the beneficiaries, with a view to upholding existing concessions. Likewise, in Sicily, much evidence for the defence by cities of their own room for manoeuvre may be found in the petitions for the suspension of royal directives deemed prejudicial to the rights of citizens, and thus for the opportunity to consult the king prior to such directives being put into effect.<sup>33</sup>

In other words, it goes without saying that one can identify numerous cases in which petitions were reiterated. At the same time comparison between various bodies of primary sources considered across a long period reveals an unequivocal rise in royal concessions that were indeed implemented. Consider, for example, one of the most controversial matters under negotiation, namely, the request that the King not alienate demesne properties, and in particular the urban communities. In actual fact, the tendency to persevere with such requests through Parliament and in other ways also, along with a slackening of royal economic demands and the identifying of alternative sources of income, led to a steep fall from the 1440s onwards in the number of communities sold off.<sup>34</sup> Conversely, sales of the royal office of Captain intensified, following on in the majority of cases from petitions submitted by the cities or by specific groups within them. Sales of the office of Captain testify to the capacity of the cities to boost their own role, despite the growth in royal financial demands. Prior to the coronation of Alfonso V, the Captain, the officer responsible for criminal jurisdiction, represented a rigorously official expression of the royal will; through the abovementioned sales, however, control over this same office was transferred to local representatives. In the cities this transfer did in its turn occasion intense conflict, often leading to the request that the magistracy in question be granted only to foreigners, or

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Sagramental en les Corts Catalanes (segles XIV–XV),” in *Les Corts a Catalunya. Actes del congrés d’història institucional, 28–30 abril 1988* (Barcelona, 1991), pp. 208–216. Esther Martí Sentañes, “Els memorials o instruccions per als síndics a Corts de la ciutat de Lleida durant el Regnat d’Alfons el Magnànim,” in *Actes del 53è Congrés de la comissió internacional per a l’estudi de la història de les institucions representatives i parlamentàries, 3–6 setembre 2003* (Barcelona, 2003) 2: 1636–37.

<sup>33</sup> Titone, *Governments*, pp. 123–26.

<sup>34</sup> Bresc, *Un monde*, 2: 857, identifies only the sale of Naro in 1453.

to requests that it not be sold at all.<sup>35</sup> This did nothing to alter the drastic change in power relations, which saw the cities extending their own control over this same office.

The sales of parts of the demesne were not an index of a lack of liberties in the cities but the inevitable consequence of the growth in royal economic requirements. The crucial fact to note is that the cities in part succeeded in turning these sales to their own advantage, and in thereby extending their system of privileges.

#### SOURCES AND THEIR LEXICON

It would seem appropriate at this point to assess certain aspects of the production of primary sources in the reign of Alfonso V, in order to clarify the meaning of the discontinuities, and in order to avoid undue emphasis upon differences with respect to earlier primary sources. I will limit myself to a discussion of materials relating to social stratification, in order to shed light upon a highly characteristic feature of the documentation, namely, the tendency to describe Sicilian society in starkly dichotomous terms. In the following paragraphs I will show how a description employing dichotomies served to mask balances of power which did not in fact correspond to descriptions of a binary kind.

The amplified role of local governments in economic policy, ordinary and extraordinary, during the reign of Alfonso V leads to an enrichment of detail relating to taxable urban groups. Particular light has been shed upon this aspect by the important researches of Stephan Epstein. An increase in financial pressure, paralleled by the royal ceding to the cities of decisions relating to financial and fiscal policy, gave rise to an increase in data, from various perspectives, regarding who was or was not able to make contributions. Even if we grant that this was an important difference from the preceding phases, it would seem to be forcing the issue to maintain, as Stephan Epstein does, that the fiscal pressure exerted by Alfonso V was the cause of the enhanced sense of identity of urban groups, which previously could not be sharply differentiated because the diverse groups did not then have a distinct group consciousness. In other words, fiscal

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<sup>35</sup> In the Parliament of 1451 a ban on the alienation of ordinary offices for the administration of justice was requested, see Francesco M. Testa, *Capitula regni Siciliae* (Palermo, 1741), 1: 367 (ch. CDXXIX).

pressure in Alfonso V's reign is held to have promoted, from the end of the 1430s, a maturation in the process whereby the Crown came to recognize the various urban groups, and, more particularly, a maturation in the process of self-recognition on the part of these same urban groups of their own economic capacities, professional distinctions etc.<sup>36</sup>

A study of the data relating to the 14th century brings to light social stratification in the cities, while data from the age of Alfonso V pertaining to the articulation of urban society offers a clearer picture of groups already in existence and identifiable in earlier years. The differentiations in evidence under Alfonso were due to a process dating from an earlier period and in many respects already well advanced during the reign of Martin I.

Moreover, vague references to urban groups may be found in both 14th and 15th century primary sources. There are a great number of generic and approximate descriptions of societies in the form of information applicable to macro-distinctions, that is to say, to broad social sectors which were themselves further subdivided. The fact that generic references to the population at large are also in evidence throughout sources produced in the 15th century should not be taken to indicate the absence of clear socio-professional differentiations. The vagueness of the references to urban societies is matched by a deliberately vague and all-inclusive lexicon. Thus, the Viceroy ratified the appointment of those elected at Agrigento in 1457–58 in the following terms: "Having received your scrutiny of the officials at the Jurats' court and the civil court and of the persons *nobilium et popularium* standing for the aforementioned offices, we elect, appoint and ordain..."<sup>37</sup> In this case, the phrase *nobiles et populares* is meant to refer to the entire society from which those elected were drawn, although the Viceroy's glancing reference does, at any rate, indicate a clear distinction between *nobiles* and *populares*. This reference cannot be considered as an exhaustive description of urban groups.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Epstein, *An island*, pp. 357–74. This interpretation was subsequently reiterated by Igor Mineo, on the basis of a specific case relating to the well-known petitions of Corleone of 1447, see Ennio I. Mineo, "Come leggere le comunità locali nella Sicilia del tardo medioevo. Alcune note sulla prima metà del Quattrocento," *MEFRM* 115/1 (2003), 597–610, in particular pp. 608–609.

<sup>37</sup> *Recepto scrutineo vestro officialium curiarum iuratorum ac civilis ac personarum nobilium et popularium concurrencium ad officia infrascripta... eligimus creamus et ordinamus...*, Titone, *I magistrati*, p. 73.

<sup>38</sup> A point valid for other situations too, and by way of comparison see Massimo Della Misericordia, *Decidere e agire in comunità nel XV secolo (un aspetto del dibattito politico del dominio sforzesco)*, in Andrea Gamberini and Giuseppe Petralia, eds., *Linguaggi*

Again in 1457–58 the Viceroy, ruling in the case of the *universitas* of Calascibetta, seems to distinguish between those elected to the Jurats' and the Judges' Courts and the others standing for offices referred to as *populares*.<sup>39</sup> In the context of a study specifically of violence in late medieval Sicily I have come across some cases in which the *habitatores* in the *terra* of Randazzo do themselves speak of *popoli* when referring to all the component parts of the society.<sup>40</sup> Whereas in Piazza, in the mid–15th century, and up until the early 16th century, one can find mentions of *popolo*, meaning those persons not to be assimilated to the well-to-do *gentiluomini et curiali*.<sup>41</sup> I should add that when the primary sources consider social distinctions in a more specific fashion *populus* is never used to refer to the population at large. Obviously sociographical descriptions change as the authors and the purpose of the sources do, and once again comparison between various different sources will enable us to avoid highly approximate interpretations of irreducibly local worlds.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, the documentary references cited above feature a description of social balances predicated upon a polarization between two groups which seem not to communicate with one another. Conversely, as I shall spell out below, there subsists a level of communication, reciprocal influence and negotiation between different socio-professional groups—a level of communication reflecting convergent interests which had the capacity to reconfigure existing hierarchies.

Bearing the above considerations in mind, I shall now go on to examine a protest at Sciacca in which the main protagonists cannot be wholly identified with the local elite.

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*politici nell'Italia del Rinascimento, Atti del convegno Pisa 9–11 novembre 2006* (Rome, 2007), pp. 291–378, who recounts circumstances in which distinctions were drawn between *gentilomini et vilani, gentilomini et rustici*, pp. 310, 327, 347.

<sup>39</sup> Titone, *I magistrati*, p. 162.

<sup>40</sup> Fabrizio Titone, "Presentation and practice of violence in late medieval Sicily in Piazza, Polizzi and Randazzo," in Samuel Cohn Jr. and Fabrizio Ricciardelli, eds., *The culture of violence in late Medieval and Early Modern Italy* (Florence, 2012), pp. 164–165.

<sup>41</sup> Fabrizio Titone, "Le 'Consuetudines terre Platee': un esempio di cultura dello scritto," in Isabella Lazzarini, ed., *Scrittura e potere. Pratiche documentarie e forme di governo nell'Italia tardomedievale, Reti Medievali-Rivista IX*, 1 (2008), p. 18.

<sup>42</sup> For a comparison, but with particular reference to the question of violence, see the many insights to be found in the important study by David Nirenberg, *Communities of violence. Persecution of minorities in the Middle Ages*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, 1998).

## THE GALLOWS RAISED

An uprising recorded in the *terra* of Sciacca towards the end of Alfonso V's reign would seem to bear out those interpretations which hold the cities to have been crushed beneath the weight of royal and seigneurial power. The same argument, it follows logically, would necessarily apply in a still more radical fashion to those groups which cannot be identified with the local elite.

On the basis of the available (but contradictory) estimates, at the end of the 1430s the *universitas* of Sciacca had between 6000 and 9000 inhabitants, although in the succeeding years demographic values registered an increase.<sup>43</sup> It is worth clarifying whether this community, with its growing population, sustained levels of political activity intense enough to prompt negotiations with the King or his representative, and deciding what the involvement of the local inhabitants amounted to. In other words, it would be of interest to know whether they were merely subjects or citizens also. As I shall demonstrate, Sciacca, though not a metropolis to vie with Palermo, presents numerous affinities with it.

The key primary source in this regard is the mandate issued by President Simone Bologna on 15 October 1455 to the *algozirus* Giovanni San Clemente.<sup>44</sup> The request for the *algozirus*, an official at the royal court whose role it was to inspect the territory, to intervene, followed a denunciation to the effect that the officials of the *terra* of Sciacca did not consent to the export of wheat belonging to the Marquis of Geraci, Giovanni Ventimiglia, and to the Count of Caltabellotta, Antonio Luna. The wheat had been bought by a Genoese merchant by the name of Gerardo (Gerardo) Millino. It should be borne in mind that Sciacca played a very important role as a centre for the harvesting and export of cereals. One cannot rule out the possibility that the community, precisely because it was an exporting centre, feared its own interests might take second place.

The President, Simone Bologna, had already ruled in favour of the sale of the wheat, but the mandate of 15 October followed on from the embassy of Andrea Perollo, visiting in the guise of syndic and orator (*sindicu et oratori*) of the *universitas*. The *universitas* had decided not simply to ban the export of the wheat but at the same time to initiate a confrontation with the President, or representative of the King in the Vice-kingdom, through

<sup>43</sup> See respectively Bresc, *Un monde*, 1: 59–77; Epstein, *An island*, pp. 33–74.

<sup>44</sup> P. R. 48, fols. 46v–47r.

one of its own representatives. Obviously Perollo's mandate was designed to ensure that the wheat did not leave the *terra*. Perollo completed his embassy but received a request to allow the wheat to be exported, obtaining in return a guarantee that the Marquis, the Count and the Genoese merchant would, if the need arose, supply Sciacca with a quantity equal to that harvested and sold from the *terra* and its territory. Such guarantees had in reality already been granted previously, and it therefore seems to be the case that Perollo's embassy would have avoided punitive actions if the exportation of the wheat had been permitted.

The above information enables us to shed some light upon an important fact: the contested grain came from Sciacca and from neighbouring territories over which the community had jurisdiction. In other words, in the case of Sciacca we can confidently assert, as has been proven for other *universitates* also,<sup>45</sup> that there existed an adjacent territorial area over which the community exercised some control, and whose resources it exploited.

It is possible that the sale had been realised when no lack of reserves was feared, and that subsequently the situation had changed. Andrea Perollo, once he had returned to the community, read out the request, and the guarantees endorsed by the President, to the city council. Here he was addressing the enlarged assembly which took decisions regarding urban economic policy and, more generally, matters that were out of the ordinary, and which had appointed him as its representative. The council's *modus operandi* entailed discussion and voting on various motions. Participants in the city council generally included some of the principal elected officials and the representatives of the various urban groups, whose number and social origins generally rose in relation to the importance of the matter under discussion, and to the prevailing balances of power. For example, in Sciacca, in 1444, following a period of enfeoffment, it was decreed that officials would decide, through a council composed of from twenty to thirty citizens of every rank and degree, every single aspect of the financial manoeuvres required to redeem the community.<sup>46</sup> The broadening of the political debate to include different representatives of the community was a development common to all the Sicilian cities,

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<sup>45</sup> Epstein, *An island*, pp. 124–33.

<sup>46</sup> C. 2843, fol. 181r., 10 January 1444.

as preliminary researches into the second half of the 15th century would also seem to confirm.<sup>47</sup>

The above account gives us a sense of the tense times experienced by the *terra*, which collectively took part in the political debate, so much so that city officials voted as a body to prohibit the export. This fact serves to shed light upon an understanding that was evidently the outcome of negotiations between representatives of distinct social groups, arguing in the name of common interests. Although the social balances and/or the dimension of conflict can be articulated in binary terms, other descriptions are equally plausible. Generally speaking, if we lay undue emphasis upon non-vertical politics in the Aragonese period, we risk focussing our attention exclusively on the possible manifestations of the confrontation between Crown and country. We ought not to accord secondary importance to the forms of negotiation evident at a local level, and from this point of view the transversal power configurations to be found at Sciacca prove similar to those recorded for Palermo a few years earlier, that is, during the *popularis* uprising of 1450.<sup>48</sup>

No sooner had Andrea Perollo read out the orders that had been issued than the protest took a more radical turn, as various sectors of the community became involved. If at the outset all the officials, without distinction, had backed the protest, now all or some of them seemed to be keeping their distance. The President was in fact informed, through some letters sent by the Jurats,<sup>49</sup> that once Perollo had made known what he had to communicate, some elements within the *populus* started to riot, issuing verbal protests and seizing hold of the wheat produced and harvested in the territory of Sciacca.

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<sup>47</sup> Titone, *Le 'Consuetudines terre Platee.'*

<sup>48</sup> Fabrizio Titone, "Il tumulto popularis del 1450. Conflitto politico e società urbana a Palermo," *Archivio Storico Italiano* 163 (2005), 43–86. By way of comparison, see the important argument regarding power relations and social changes which do not correspond to descriptions of a binary type, in Theodore B. Leinwand, "Negotiation and new historicism," *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 105 (1990), 477–90.

<sup>49</sup> I have not identified the officials, among them the Jurats, active in these months. Generally elections took place around September and the officials remained in office for the whole of the notional administrative year (*annum indictionis*) that ran from the first of September to 31 August. The scrutinies for the fourth administrative year were dated 29 May 1456 of the fourth administrative year, and hence they were held late in that administrative year. The choice of such a date was generally due to emergency conditions, and in this case very probably on account of the riot. In other words, those newly elected may have replaced the previous officials. The final phases of the Viceroy's intervention with regard to the instigators of the riot are recorded in June 1456, P. R. 48, fols. 360v–361r.



Was this a spontaneous action, or at any rate an action without any debate? The primary sources do not appear to corroborate this hypothesis. The protest was organized and controlled: on the basis of votes, those who took part in the uprising stood guard night and day over the storehouses in order to stop the grain from being exported. Just as motions proposed by the councillors in the council were voted on, so too here, whoever took part in the protest voted on what was to be done. It would appear that the practice of political debate—discussion and voting—was familiar to the rioters. This is a point of particular significance, serving to show how *populus* and government elite were not isolated one from the other but in constant communication.<sup>50</sup> Since this action was dubbed a wicked and very bad example by the Court, we must presume that it feared that the other centres might emulate it. I will comment shortly on this point, and on the instigators of the uprising.

It is now worth devoting some attention to the repressive measures that were adopted. The response would seem to have been particularly harsh: the *algozarius* was instructed to make his way to Sciacca and, first of all, to have the gallows erected in the city square—*faczati prima facie erigiri et plantari in la placza li furlii*. Then, with the collaboration of a person versed in the law he was to hold trials in order to incarcerate and condemn the guilty parties. In this fashion due punishment was to be inflicted upon the guilty, and a warning issued to anyone else. At the same time officials were required to make it plain where they stood. The city officials were supposed to obey the *algozarius*, in his role as the President's representative. Those who refused would be liable to suffer the death penalty and the publication (or confiscation) of their goods. Furthermore, they were obliged to collaborate with the *algozarius* in facilitating the exportation of the grain.<sup>51</sup> The unambiguous nature of the directives issued to the officials was obviously also due to the ease with which the role each had played, either as collaborators with the royal official or as his opponents, could be identified. Indeed, once the *algozarius* had intervened, the officials began to take their distance from the rioters, and the result was that only those who did not belong to the ruling class were hunted down.

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<sup>50</sup> For a comparison, but regarding the early modern period, see in particular Peter Burke, *Popular culture in early modern Europe* (Farnham, 2009) and Francesco Benigno, "Il popolo che abbiamo perduto. Note sul concetto di cultura popolare tra storia e antropologia," *Giornale di storia costituzionale* 18 (2009), 151–78.

<sup>51</sup> P. R. 48, fols. 46v–47r.

The repressive measures adopted seem less surprising once one subsumes all the *universitates* within the purview of a single analysis, an indispensable method given the close relations between the various communities. The fear that events in Sciacca might be imitated was in reality not unfounded. In 1450, in Palermo, a riot with a significant impact upon local politics, and upon relations with the King, was recorded. Repression against those responsible for the Palermitan riot was instigated between May and July 1450, but already in the November of that same year, in a centre a considerable distance from Palermo, namely, Piazza, news had arrived of those events. Likewise in another community, Polizzi, the Palermo riot was in fact evoked during the disorders of the early months of 1451.<sup>52</sup> There seemed good cause to fear that the concatenation of circumstances recorded a few years before might be repeated in the aftermath of the uprising at Sciacca.

#### THE GALLOWS PULLED DOWN

The sequence of events enables us to shed a clearer light not only on the confrontation between Crown and community but also on the various jurisdictional levels relating to the urban universe. The decision to dispatch the *algozirus* on the one hand, and the interest shown by the segneurial exponents on the other, would seem to leave a community condemned to suffer a politics of repression with no room for manoeuvre. This proved not to be the case, however, since the subsequent developments were very far from being characterized by subordination or by a readiness to submit to an exercise of authority deemed to be unjust.

In January 1456, upon learning that the situation in Sciacca had taken an unexpected turn, the Viceroy Lop Ximen de Urrea resolved to intervene. He took the decision to send Lemmo de Bracco, one of the commissioners at the Royal Court, that is to say, the most important tribunal in the Vice-Kingdom. The commissioner, in collaboration with the captain, and the captain's judge—the royal officials at the head of the city tribunal with criminal jurisdiction of the first degree—was supposed to have instigated proceedings against whoever had incited *plebem et multitudinem gentium* against the *algozirus* Giovanni di Santo Clemente.<sup>53</sup> The wording no longer referred to *populus* but to *plebs et gens*, that is to say, those who

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<sup>52</sup> Titone, "Presentation."

<sup>53</sup> P. R. 48, fol. 134rv.

would seem to have been regarded as sectors of the community that were at once easily swayed and numerous. At the same time we cannot rule out the possibility that some of those who lived in the countryside had taken part in the protest, given the close ties between Sciacca and the adjoining territory.

It is worth recounting what was intimated in one of the Viceroy's subsequent mandates: "Some from the *terra* of Sciacca have come close to committing acts of resistance against the removal of wheat,"<sup>54</sup> and "Many of the *populo* have inveighed against the royal representative and pulled down the gallows and flung them away."<sup>55</sup> There was thus created an unsustainable climate of fear, which made it impossible for the royal representative to perform his official duties.<sup>56</sup> The attack on the gallows had a very powerful symbolic value, inasmuch as it implied a refusal to tolerate an extraordinary extension of royal authority within the community. References to the riot in the primary sources suggest that the actions of the *populares* were highly expressive and instinctive but not therefore irrational, as I shall show below. Indeed, there were powerful manifestations of role reversal, a pivotal and routine aspect of rituals of rebellion, in which those who are subordinate decide to propose their own vision of justice, rejecting the exercise of power imposed from above.<sup>57</sup> A deliberate decision is taken to challenge any exercise of authority that is out of the ordinary and deemed unjustly restrictive, through an action which does not jeopardise the safety of the royal representative. Granted the arbitrary value of every recourse to metaphorical interpretations, I would nonetheless propose that we imagine urban space as a theatre, in which a group of actors ordinarily relegated to the wings all of a sudden take centre stage. The pulling-down of the gallows unequivocally guaranteed the *populares* a leading role.

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<sup>54</sup> *Nonnulli de terra Sacce predicta super extraccione frumentorum certas quasi resistencias et enormitates commiserunt*; P. R. vol. 48, fol. 360v, 22 June 1456.

<sup>55</sup> *Plures de populo cum tumulto et vociferacionibus contra eum insurrexissent lignaque furcarum predictarum cepissent et alonge proiecissent*; *ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> P. R. 48, fols. 360v–361r. There is further mention of episodes involving resistance to the royal official in P. R. 48, fol. 244r, 31 March 1456.

<sup>57</sup> For a comparison, albeit in a different context, see the important contribution of Chris Humphrey, *The politics of carnival. Festive misrule in medieval England* (Manchester-New York, 2001), a study distinguished for its lucid methodological proposals. For a discussion of role reversal, I would refer the reader to Barbara Babcock, *Introduction*, in Barbara Babcock ed., *The reversible world. Symbolic inversion in art and society* (Ithaca-London, 1978), pp. 13–36 in particular pp. 14–15.

The Viceroy would seem to have been particularly concerned to send an official versed in law, by virtue of his role in the Royal Court, and at the same time he requested direct involvement on the part of the main royal officials active at the local level. Ordinary practice dictated that the captain's sentences could be appealed at the Royal Court, since by means of trials presided over by the commissioner and the captain a swifter staging of the same could be guaranteed. Lemmo de Bracco did indeed have the task of putting on trial not *plebs et gens* but those who had incited *plebs et gens* against the previous commissioner.<sup>58</sup>

The fact that the royal commissioner was assisted by the captain and the captain's judge was not insignificant, given that the captain then in office was of local extraction.<sup>59</sup> The main royal representative at the local level could guarantee a channel of communication between the *universitates* and the royal court. The confrontation led to a policy that, far from being repressive, would turn out to be just the opposite. On 22 June 1456 the Viceroy decided to pardon every transgression, either of those who had fled or of those who, more generally, had been implicated in the acts of resistance to the royal official. He arrived at this decision after a resolution of the royal council had been passed, and the petition presented by the *universitas* and by some *familiares et domestici regis*, and after some consideration of the royal interests at stake.<sup>60</sup> The listing of the factors underlying the decision in favour of a pardon reveals the existence of channels of communication between the community and the Crown. In rehearsing the terms of this same pardon it was made clear that provision had always been made for guarantees ensuring that the community did not suffer from a shortage of wheat. A pardon of this sort reflects the essential fluidity of the relations between rulers and ruled, such that the modalities of the exercise of power could be wholly contested, and, more particularly, indicates just how rarely, in the confrontation between Crown and country, recourse was had to coercion.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> P. R. 48, fol. 134rv.

<sup>59</sup> The captain in question was probably Pietro Bondelmonte (Buondelmonte) or Antonio Calandrino, see P. R. 44, fols. 35v–36r and in particular P. R. 47, fol. 110r.

<sup>60</sup> P. R. 48, fols. 360v–361r. Assuming that pardon is generally granted to persons actually involved, the primary source specifically names Pietro Lutrumbecta, *magister* Simone Spataru, Nicola Gassararu, Lemmo Ianecto, Antonio Faczellu, Nicola Lutrumbecta *et certi alii*. Paolo de Playa was excluded from the pardon.

<sup>61</sup> On the exercise of power and its possible configurations in the medieval period, I will limit myself to the demanding essays contained in Robert F. Berkhofer III, Alan Cooper and Adam Kostó, eds., *The experience of power in medieval Europe, 950–1350* (Aldershot, 2005).

## THE CAUSES OF THE PROTEST

One of the most interesting details to emerge concerns the identity of those who took part in the protest movement. The sheer complexity of social stratification in the cities of Sicily was especially apparent at moments of conflict.

References in the primary sources to those responsible vary markedly: initially the *populus* is mentioned, but then reference is made to certain persons who had incited *plebs et gens* against the *algezirius*, and finally in the pardon reference is again made to the *populus* as author of the uprising. There would seem to be two main causes underlying the decision to punish only those who had fomented the reprisals. Striking only the actual ring-leaders still sent a clear message to all those who had taken part. At the same time the decision not to harry representatives of the *plebs et gens* appears to reflect both a search for a practical resolution that would render intervention feasible and the difficulty of tracing all those who had taken part.

The rioters did not belong to the urban elite. For the time being I will simply note that the term *populus* refers here to a part of the population that was obviously more vulnerable to grave grain shortages. On the basis of an analysis of other cases contemporary with the events in Sciacca, I conclude that the *populares* were a numerous and economically weak sector of society, in which one may include the poor, though with the proviso that the *populares* and the poor not simply be equated. This conclusion enables us, in my opinion, to explain the reference to the *gens* and to the *plebs*, who would seem to be contiguous with the *populus*. The reference to the resources of the surrounding territory, and the preoccupation with the harvest, shows that the *populares* were prey to the widely held fear of suffering from a dearth of grain, and therefore vulnerable to speculative ventures. In other words, it was believed that, at a time of emergency, the community had the right to re-enter into possession of its own property. This point enables us to clarify the refusal to tolerate the sight of the gallows, a veritable outrage given the community's view of its petition as wholly legitimate. But that was not the only reason.

The action taken by the *populus* had a deeper, albeit undeclared motivation, namely, a refusal to countenance the right of a member of a seigneurial dynasty to control the resources of the community, and this fact accounts, in my opinion, for the transversality of the protest, at any rate at the outset, when officers were involved. The underlying motives were in fact deep-seated. In the reign of Alfonso V, Sciacca had suf-

ferred two enfeoffments—from 1423 to 1432 and from 1438 to 1443—and having emancipated itself from the seigneurial dynasty's control it requested, and finally, after one thwarted attempt, was granted, the right not to be alienated ever again.<sup>62</sup> It was not solely a question of maintaining the level of reserve supplies deemed necessary, but also of ruling against the *dominus*, and more specifically against the Count of Caltabellotta and the Marquis of Geraci. Evidently the *populares* saw seigneurial control as being against their own best interests.

The sense of unease to which the uprising testifies had, I believe, a number of additional causes. The unusual decision to call for the erection of the gallows was particularly risky because it evoked the same symbolism as the seigneurial dynasties had employed, at any rate to judge by 14th century primary sources, since, once the Kings had granted them the right to dispense penal jurisdiction, they symbolized this prerogative by raising a gibbet at the entrance to the fief.<sup>63</sup> The use of a symbolism more generally associated with the seigneurial dynasties may have radicalized the protest. Nor can we rule out the possibility of the Crown having here signalled its inclination to reverse its habitual policy of favouring the *universitates*. Assuming that the demesne communities really did enjoy considerable room for manoeuvre, it is possible that the Viceroy had glimpsed the emergence of an exercise of power on the part of the community that was by now impervious to the reactions of the royal court. In this regard it should be noted that in 1434 Sciacca had obtained jurisdictional privileges over trials of the first and second instance for civil cases up to 50 *onze* and, to a limited extent, for some criminal cases.<sup>64</sup> In other words, the gallows may have been meant to indicate that the harsh justice characteristic of seigneurial dominions was also going to be dispensed by the royal government.

Finally, I wish to advance a hypothesis regarding the causes of the uprising, or rather its protracted nature, which go beyond the confrontation

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<sup>62</sup> After the first enfeoffment the community entered two separate petitions, one shortly after the other, on 8 August 1433 and on 10 March 1434, with a view to consolidating its reincorporation into the demesne. The texts of these petitions may be found in P. R. 33, fols. 197r–198v and R. C. 69, fols. 102v–106v respectively. Even after the second enfeoffment a further important petition was drafted and presented, C. 2843, fols. 179v–182r, 10 January 1444.

<sup>63</sup> Vincenzo D'Alessandro, *Politica e società nella Sicilia aragonese* (Palermo, 1963), p. 258.

<sup>64</sup> R. C. 69, fols 104r–105r, 16 March 1434. The appellate judge and the appellate notary were chosen by scrutiny in 1436–37, which confirms the supposition that court privileges had been applied. Titone, *I magistrati*, p. 114.

with the seigneurial dynasty. The uprising, it seems to me, also reflects the need felt by a sector of the community to give vent to its feelings about the social order, to reject the prevailing hierarchy and the existing balance of power. The protest assumed this character only in its final and most violent phase, following on from the erection of the gallows. In this regard there may have been latent tensions between the various urban groups in Sciacca, tensions which probably found indirect expression in the turbulent events described and, in particular, in the pivotal role played by the *populares*. In order to understand what may in my opinion be defined as a state of unease liable to tip over at any moment into riot and rebellion, it is necessary to consider the various interests affected by taxation policies.

Suppose we consider a case of proportional tax in Sciacca. In 1434, with a view to finding the money needed for the repair of the city walls, prominent citizens, by virtue of their role as representatives of the *universitas*, called upon the Jurats, through a council composed exclusively of *gintilomini*, to impose a differentiated monthly tax which provided for a ceiling of one *tari* and 10 *grani* and a minimum rate of 5 *grani*.<sup>65</sup> The lack of any clear specification of any intermediate taxes seems somewhat suspicious. In another context I have argued that the indicating of a maximum and a minimum rate without also specifying intermediate taxes implies a loose relationship between taxation and the criterion of proportionality, and is a sign of a levy that might well favour the more prosperous groups.<sup>66</sup> This is an argument that could be bolstered by the following consideration. Although there is no indication of there being any, we cannot rule out the existence, between the maximum and minimum rates stipulated, of intermediate taxes. Nonetheless, the fact that neither the size of the intermediate rates nor the number of possible rates are specified,<sup>67</sup> shows that it was very much left to the discretion of the proposers of such imposts to decide whom to tax, and how much to tax them. This doubt regarding the rigour with which the criterion of proportionality was applied is clearly

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<sup>65</sup> R. C. 69, fols 102v–106v, 16 March 1434. The petitions were presented by the Jurats Paolo Argumento and Guglielmo de Insola, and by the *domini milites* Mainente Bendilumunti (Buondelmonte) and Orlando de Amato, and by the *dominus* Antonio de Bonanno *legum doctor*. The previous year (1432–33) Paolo Argumento and Guglielmo de Insola had been elected Jurats and Antonio de Bonanno Judge of the Civil Court, Titone, *I magistrati*, p. 113.

<sup>66</sup> Titone, *Governments*, pp. 145–146.

<sup>67</sup> In 1335, Frederick III established a new impost for the community of Nicosia, with a graduated scale of different rates, see Titone, *Governments*, pp. 38–39.

reinforced by the request to summon a council, consisting solely of the wealthiest in the community, which would decide whom to tax.

This was a point that would seem to have been grasped by the King, who agreed to the petition but proposed an important modification, to the effect that, assuming that the *miserabiles* would be exempt, three representatives of the nobles (or *gintilomini*), *borgesi* and artisans respectively—*nobilium*, *borgesium* and *ministalium*—would have carried out the proposed taxation.<sup>68</sup> The failure to include a representative of the *populares* proves how marginalized they were in the exercise of power. This does not mean that they were exempt from taxation, because generally speaking the *populus* was included among the taxable groups.

The taxes proposed in 1434, notwithstanding the modifications introduced by the King, indicate, in my opinion, an urban policy that tended to be detrimental to the economic interests of those *habitatores* who had a more marginal socio-professional role. The King's failure to include a representative of the *populus* seems to me to reflect his wish to ensure rapid implementation, it thus being easier to achieve compromises between those responsible for taxation, but also his intention to undermine still further the role of the *populus*, whose humiliation, however, had been greater still in the original petition. The most important element to consider is the object of the council, namely, the fixing of a new tax for the repair of the city walls, a task which had very often to be tackled by the communities during these years. It would seem to be the case, in other words, that the *populus* was neither ordinarily nor automatically considered to be an integral part of debates in the council. We have earlier cited the council session of 1444, which represents a profoundly different session because its purpose was to find the sums needed for redemption, and it therefore had an extraordinary character. In this latter case the council consisted of twenty to thirty citizens of every degree, and *populares* may have been amongst them, though we are not in a position to ascertain whether this was in fact so. The exceptional nature of the circumstance means that we cannot deduce that the inclusion of *populares* was the norm. It seems more plausible to conclude that the *populus* was included in debates in

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<sup>68</sup> In the *collette* (royal hearth tax) of 1375–76, the “wretched (*miserabili persone*)” were exempted, see Peri, *Restaurazione*, p. 66. In Catalonia the *miserabiles* were the less well-to-do, for whom the local governments requested complete exemption from the royal *collette*, a request never granted by the Crown, see Jordi Morelló Baget, *Fiscalitat i deute públic en dues viles del camp de Tarragona. Reus i Valls, segles XIV–XV* (Barcelona, 2001), pp. 248–51.



extraordinary circumstances or following on from its explicit bids to win greater visibility. In other words, we cannot rule out the possibility that in 1455–1456 the protest gave voice to internal tensions with regard to rulers and that the *populus* laid claim to greater visibility.

The royal pardon on 22 June 1456 featured the names of 6 persons, among them a *magister*, with all the others deemed responsible being vaguely identified as *certi alii*. With regard to the presence of a *magister* (Simone Spataru),<sup>69</sup> it should be stressed that artisans loomed large in the *universitates*, a fact borne out by the request voiced in various communities for the setting-up of guilds, one of whose aims was to decide upon the qualifications required in a person wishing to practice a specific craft. By means of this strategy the guilds hoped to ensure that a craft was properly supervised, and that access to it was limited, a preoccupation linked to the population boom of those years. From this point of view, the details relating to the guilds active in Palermo are compelling evidence for the above claim. On the other hand, the world of the artisan might be internally differentiated. In 1446, in Catania, mention is made of *ministrali et artisti*, designations which probably indicate, as in Barcelona, differentiations in rank amongst the artisans.<sup>70</sup> In Catania they obtained the right, as had been stipulated originally, to intervene again in the general council, and this time not with two consuls for all the crafts but with two for each craft.<sup>71</sup> On the basis of all this information we cannot exclude processes of marginalization within a craft when artisans did not respect the qualifications required, nor, more generally, can we rule out the presence of artisans who played an autonomous, non-organized role.

So far as Sciacca is concerned, I have found no trace of any guilds, but the artisans did have a role in government.<sup>72</sup> To judge by the lists of those elected in Sciacca, Simone Spataru is not among those taking part in government; his inclusion among the *populares* suggests that the *populares* and the world of the artisans (or certain sectors of it) may indeed have

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<sup>69</sup> See note 60.

<sup>70</sup> On the structuring of Barcelonese society, divided into groups of “ciutadans honrats, mercaders, artistes e menestres,” with these last two terms both referring to artisans, but with *artistes* denoting the more important ones such as silversmiths and goldsmiths, I refer the reader to Batlle Gallart and Busqueta Riu, “Distribució social i formes de vida”, in Jaume Sobrequés Callicó ed., *Història de Barcelona, La ciutat consolidada (segles XIV i XV)* (Barcelona, 1991–1997), 3: 91–136.

<sup>71</sup> Giambruno-Genuardi, *Capitoli*, pp. 190–192.

<sup>72</sup> Titone, *I magistrati*, pp. 36, 109–118; Titone, *Governments*, pp. 259–60.

been contiguous, in all likelihood a contiguity due to professional affinities relating to manual labour. We can find indirect confirmation of this hypothesis in an undated text listing the customs of Sciacca, the compilation of which was the result of revisions and additions to earlier texts, probably carried out in the 15th century. Detailed indications are given, based on the social group and gender of the deceased, as to how the bell was to be tolled in celebrating the funeral rites. Two strokes of the middle bell would be sounded for artisans and for those engaged in manual labour—*pro ministrilibus et personis qui manibus laborant*. The *populares* are not mentioned directly but the norm would seem to refer to them,<sup>73</sup> as we can deduce from elements known to us in the case of other *universitates*. Thus at Palermo, in 1450, amongst the *populares* we also find manual workers, a datum that recurs at Patti, where in 1467 the *poviri popolari* must have made a contribution not economically but by using their brute strength to help with the repairs to the city walls.<sup>74</sup>

These data aside, in my opinion the contiguity of interest between *populares* and artisans was mainly economic in nature. In the artisans the *populares* had an interlocutor who could assist them politically in the safeguarding of their own best interests. For example, in Catania, in 1450, artisans and *populares* were the joint authors of petitions which chiefly consisted of denunciations and requests for enquiries into speculative ventures ascribed to certain *gentilomini* and the Jurats regarding contracts for *gabelle* and grain sales.<sup>75</sup> In general, this data enables us to assert that the *populares* were not systematically excluded from government policy. We cannot rule out the possibility that they played a part in government, albeit in extraordinary circumstances or in ordinary circumstances but alongside other groups with a more prominent socio-economic role.

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<sup>73</sup> A fact that becomes clear once one considers the various other groups mentioned, see Pellegrino Mortillaro, ed., *Il Libro Rosso della città di Sciacca* (Sciacca, 2003), p. 88.

<sup>74</sup> Giovan C. Sciacca, *Patti e l'amministrazione del comune nel medioevo* (Palermo, 1907), pp. 322–23.

<sup>75</sup> Giambruno-Genuardi, *Capitoli*, pp. 200–206. The petitions were presented by the *consuli et populi*. In this case we are not told that the former were the representatives of the artisans, but we can deduce as much both from the fact that one of the petitions concerns participation in the council (*ibid.*, p. 202), a prerogative obtained in these years precisely by the *magistri*, and because in other cases those speaking of consuls only have artisans in mind; for example *ibid.*, pp. 184–85, 1446; pp. 190–91, p. 1446; Matteo Gaudioso, “Atti dei Giurati di Catania,” *Archivio Storico di Catania* vol. 11, 1, p. 1, 1447; vol. 12, 2, p. 110, 1449.

Moreover, amongst those pardoned in the aftermath of the riot there was also one Ianecto (or Iannetta) Lemmo, probably a relative of Guglielmo, elected in 1432–33 as catapan (*acatapanus*)—an official responsible for overseeing markets—and of the *notarius* Manfredi, elected Judge in 1419–1420. Another who took part in the uprising, and the only person not to be pardoned, was Paolo de Playa/Pilaia, whom we can plausibly trace back to the onomastic group Pilaia, which included, but at a much earlier period, two Jurats, namely, Marco, elected in 1399–1400, and Antonio, elected in 1406–1407.<sup>76</sup>

Can we then entertain the hypothesis that the *populus* is a group of citizens, at any rate at Sciacca, with an organic role in government? I have my doubts about this hypothesis, not least because of the data relating to political confrontations, in which they are plainly not involved. What is clear is that internally the *populus* was highly stratified, that it included manual workers, and probably also workers on the land, but also modest artisans, and that it could on occasion enter into contact with persons close to government circles, or with actual government representatives. The fact that the *populus* was cited as instigator of the riot does not constitute proof that all those taking part in the riot were *populares*. As I pointed out above, the lexicon used in the sources may be misleading and in its more practical aspects highly imprecise. Where Sciacca is concerned, the term *populares* would seem to be used in such a way that it also includes those probably originating in other sectors, and one spoke of *populus* on this occasion because the majority of those taking part in the riot originated in the *populus*. This majority cannot, however, simply be equated with the local elite, and yet it did have a political role to play, and though not obtaining as much as it might have hoped, it avoided prosecution for the acts of resistance perpetrated. On the other hand, those taking part in the uprising never managed to give a systematic form to their own requests, nor, once the city officials had distanced themselves from the protest, to identify a strategy open to mediations. Findings such as these may mislead us, and give the impression that the requests were politically weak. I do not think it justified to regard the failure of the *populus* to systematize its requests as proof that the motivations underlying the protest were insubstantial. The convergence of various demands and

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<sup>76</sup> For the elections see Titone, *I magistrati*, pp. 109, 111–13. As regards the others who were granted a pardon and whose names are mentioned, we lack both general information on them and any clues as to their links or otherwise with government milieux. See note 60.

expectations, though expressed in a disordered fashion, does not diminish the importance of the requests relating to economic factors, political representation, and taking a stand against the seigneurial dynasty.

### CONCLUSIONS

In this study the decision to restrict the enquiry to the 14th and 15th centuries was chiefly motivated by the fact of the *universitates* having significant elements in common, elements reflecting the royal stance of openness towards the urban world. This decision should not be taken to imply a wish to deny the existence of important civic realities in previous centuries—one merely has to reflect on the fact that the customs drafted in the early 14th century were redraftings and revisions of earlier texts—but rather to bring to light the political importance of the urban world in the 14th and 15th centuries.

The vastness of the demesne, and the high population densities to be found within it, are clearly reflected in the diversity of social contexts and of local economic realities, a diversity, moreover, expressed in often highly diverse structures of government, as in processes of mediation involving markedly different policies and timescales. This is not to rule out a gradual rise in important elements in common, which slowly eroded the pronounced differences evident at the beginning of the 14th century. These elements clearly serve to show how government institutions in Sicily did not constitute given, uniform realities but were liable to alter in response to pressure from below.

The period of crisis undergone by the cities during the government of the Vicars was probably at the origin of the political fortunes enjoyed by the urban world from the end of the 14th century onwards. The crushing of the military and territorial might of the seigneurial lords, prosecuted and achieved by Martin I, enabled the cities to recover lost ground in the early 14th century, and, once free of the threat posed by the overwhelming seigneurial power of the second half of the 14th century, to develop the urban world. This balance of power between the Crown and the cities subsisted throughout the 15th century.

The involvement in city politics of broad sectors of Sicilian society is probably one of the major consequences of the consolidation and extension of the leeway available to the citizenry. By the same token there was now a Crown prepared to sponsor processes of mediation reflecting a policy of a tendentially more inclusive character arising out of strong pressure from below.

In the present essay I have recalled a specific case having to do with a riot whose course and outcome do not reflect contexts that were devoid of political debate or wholly subordinated to royal policies. On the other hand, the opposition to the exporting of the grain represents only one, and probably not the main, cause underlying the riot. David Nirenberg has argued for “a range of multiple meanings inherent in the violence, some of which we might call stabilizing, others the contrary.”<sup>77</sup> This claim certainly holds good for episodes of violence in late medieval Sicily. The events in Sciacca reveal, on the one hand, a determination to confirm a pre-existing balance of power by effecting the outright exclusion of the *dominus* from the task of administering the property of the *terra*. At the same time, the initial involvement of the officials shows just how mutable, and subject to far-reaching reconfigurations, the alliances and the hierarchies might be. On the other hand, those episodes which were viewed by the Viceroy as being acts tantamount to resistance reflect an unease probably arising out of none too equitable, and far from inclusive, tax policies. Even in non-metropolitan circumstances such as were to be found in Sciacca we can discern significant social stratification and elements indicating both the presence of social mobility and that of communication between the various groups. Indeed, even if the *populus* did not represent the local elite, it would seem to have been in contact with government representatives and to have occupied a key position in the debate with the Crown. The general pardon indicates both the Crown’s concern to preserve a peaceful climate whereby the *populares* did not feel marginalized, and its awareness of the role played by them in maintaining local balances of power. Finally, if at first glance the protagonists of the riot did not seem to stand any chance of obtaining what they had wished for, we cannot rule out the possibility that in the aftermath of the disturbances they may well have obtained an important outcome, namely, keeping Sciacca within the demesial context and blocking further alienations of the *terra*.

Wim Blockmans has shown how in the realm of historical explanation it is necessary to address complex systems which feature variables and interactions which alter over time, fashioning an approach which might perhaps avoid “the Scylla of purely descriptive juxtapositions of

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<sup>77</sup> On the effects of violence in general, and more specifically as regards relations between Christians and other religious groups, Nirenberg, *Communities*, pp. 227–228.

unique cases, as well as the Charybdis of teleological over-simplification.”<sup>78</sup> Despite the ever-increasing number of studies devoted to the cities in late medieval Sicily, few historians seem as yet to be adopting an approach which considers in a critical fashion the sheer range of different sources available for consultation. At the same time, the very fact of our being able to speak convincingly of urban history in late medieval Sicily shows incontrovertibly how vital it is that we free ourselves from approaches that are anachronistic and/or teleological, and that we consider events on the island in and for themselves.

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<sup>78</sup> Wim Blockmans, “Cities, networks and territories. North-central Italy and the Low Countries reconsidered,” in Paolo Guglielmotti-Isabella Lazzarini-Gian Maria Varanini, eds., *Europa e Italia. Studi in onore di Giorgio Chittolini. Europe and Italy. Studies in honor of Giorgio Chittolini* (Florence, 2011), pp. 43–54 (the quotation is at p. 43).



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## INDEX

- Abbassids 2, 42, 64, 99, 103  
 Abbatellis 238, 252, 343, 362  
 ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm b. ‘Abd al-Wāḥid 116  
 ‘Abd Allāh b. Ḥamdūn 101  
 ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad al-Muqrī’  
   al-Ṣiqillī 101  
 ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad  
   al-Buṭīrī 109  
 ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān b. Ramaḍān  
   al-Malaṭī 108  
 ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān of Trapani 109  
 Abenafia 454, 458–459  
 Abraham ibn Daud 442 n. 21  
 Abram de Fano 474  
 Abū ‘Abd Allāh Ḥusayn b. Abī ‘Alā 108  
 Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. ‘Abd  
   al-Raḥmān al-Ṣā’igh 444  
 Abū ‘l-‘Arab al-Ṣiqillī 117  
 Abū Bakr al-Samanṭārī 98  
 Abū Ḥafṣ ‘Umar b. Ḥasan al-Naḥwī 108  
 Abū Ḥafṣ ‘Umar b. Raḥīq 118  
 Abū l-Ḥayy b. Ḥakīm, *av bet din* of  
   Palermo 481  
 Abū l-Qāsim 112, 214–215  
 Abū Muḥammad al-Qāsim al-Tamīmī  
   108, 116  
 Abū Sa’id al-Abzārī 447  
 Abū Yahyā Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b.  
   Qādim 101  
 Abū’ l-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Abī’ l-Faṭḥ b. Khalaf  
   al-Umawī 114  
 Abū’ l-Ṣalt 114  
 Abū’ l-Ḍaw 114, 123  
 Abū’ l-Qāsim al-Ṣiqillī 98  
 Abū-l-Qāsim (Kalbid emir) 48  
 Acciaiuoli 340–341  
 accord of Caspe 452  
*adab* 94, 104, 110, 119–120, 125–126  
 Adelaide 133–134, 136, 142  
 Adelaide of Golisano 216, 225  
 Africa 13 n. 10, 16, 30, 34, 37–38, 44  
 Agatha (saint) 351, 366  
 Aghlabids 1, 2 n. 4, 39–41, 42 n. 15, 44, 63,  
   66, 68, 72, 79, 101, 438  
 agricultural activities 330  
 Agrigento 28, 49, 258, 361, 436, 443, 505  
 Aḥīṭuv ben Yiṣḥaq 467  
 Aḥmad (Kalbid emir) 46, 48  
 Aḥmad b. al-Ḥasan 75–78  
 Aḥmad b. Qurhub cf. Ibn Qurhub  
 Aiutamichristo 347  
*Alachadeb, Abenladeb, Abeladel, Belladeb,*  
*Biladep* cf. Yiṣḥaq Ibn al-Aḥḍab  
 Alagona 340, 490  
 al-Akḥal 108  
 al-Barādhī’ 101  
 Albergheria 218 n. 106, 236, 250, 258, 271,  
   308–309, 312, 342, 350, 353, 355–358, 365,  
   376–377, 477, 479–480  
 Alcamo 238–239, 247, 262, 480  
 Alcherius 204 n. 42, 445  
*al-dayyāṣīn* 477  
 Alessandro of Telese 300  
 Alexandria 33 n. 140, 55, 114, 120, 235, 263,  
   328, 442–443, 465, 471  
 Alfonso III 478, 490  
 Alfonso V the Magnanimous 4, 452, 465  
 Alfonso X 433  
*algozirius* Giovanni San Clemente 507,  
   511  
 ‘Alī b. al-Ḥasan al-Tūbī 107  
 ‘Alī b. Ṣalāḥ 445  
*al-jama* (Arabic: *al-jamā’a*) or *universitas*  
   *Iudeorum* 480  
 Alliata 347  
 Altofonte 246, 304, 362–363  
 Amalfi 261, 328  
 Amalfitania 258, 331  
 Amalfitans 204, 220, 331, 337, 357  
 Amatus of Montecassino 79  
*amêras* 202 n. 31, 203  
*Amprisa* of Naples 452  
 Anaṭoli b. Yosef 465  
 Andrea Perollo 507–509  
 Angevins 3, 250, 338, 341, 343, 443, 449  
   n. 60, 452, 489–490  
*‘aniyye Siṣīlīya* (the poor of Sicily) 442  
 Anna, mother of the priest Grisantus  
   420  
 annalistic 430  
 Anonimo Vaticano 201  
 anti-jewish preaching 356, 461  
 anti-jewish riots 461  
 Ansaldo *magister* of the *Castrum Superius*  
   *Panormi* 208  
 Antiochian milieu 422

- apprenticeship 278, 464  
 aqueduct of Ficarazzi 252  
 Arabic 4, 16, 37, 39 n. 3, 47 n. 42, 50  
   n. 56, 52, 54 n. 69, 56, 57 n. 82, 61,  
   63–64, 73 n. 53, 79, 81, 89–93, 102–108,  
   110 n. 76, 113, 115, 119–120, 124, 128, 148  
   n. 24, 149, 161, 162 n. 63, 164, 170, 173,  
   196–197, 200, 203, 208 n. 62, 209–212,  
   214, 218, 220, 223–224, 308, 310, 327,  
   330–331, 345, 351, 413, 417–424, 426–428,  
   429 n. 60, 434–435, 439, 444, 446, 451,  
   463–465, 468–469, 471, 473, 475–476,  
   480–481, 482 n. 219  
 Arabic poetry of Sicily 103, 105–107, 115  
 Arabic-speaking population 419  
 Arabo-Graeco-Latin psalters 417  
 Arabophony 423, 425, 435–436  
 Aragonese 2–3, 198 n. 13, 240, 250, 255,  
   281, 296, 306, 316, 431–432, 435, 446,  
   451–452, 456, 489, 491, 500, 503, 509  
 Aragonese dynasty 314, 339, 360, 366,  
   427 n. 54, 429  
 Aragonese viceroyalty 432  
 Aramaic 420, 434–435, 463  
 archaeological data 51 n. 60, 61–63, 65,  
   67–68, 80–85, 197 n. 10, 214, 326–327  
 archbishop Walter 172 n. 87, 217, 404  
 Archbishop's Palace 82, 206 n. 52, 215,  
   223, 240, 295, 372  
 archimandrite of S. Salvatore 349  
*Archivio Capitolare* of Santa Maria  
   Maggiore in Nicosia 493  
 archon of Palermo 24  
 Arenella 253–254  
 aristocracy 25, 30, 142, 205, 209, 222, 225,  
   235, 240–241, 243–244, 252, 258, 266,  
   270, 272–274, 287, 289, 291, 296, 319, 337,  
   347, 368, 370, 420, 499  
 Arnold of Villanova 313, 427, 461, 478  
*ars dictaminis* 424, 429  
 Arsenal 48, 53, 54 n. 69, 69, 71, 211 n. 74,  
   217, 220, 249–250, 330, 337, 345  
 Artale I Alagona 490  
 artisans 52, 221, 239–240, 247–248, 250,  
   256, 260, 279, 280, 288, 291, 293–294,  
   335, 343, 391–392, 479, 517–520  
 Asad b. al-Furāt 94, 101  
*Asadīya* 94  
*Atenuif camerarius* 208  
*augustale* 454  
*aula regia* 301, 310, 320  
 aulic Sicilian 433  
*Avicenna's Canon* 470, 472  
 Avignon Papacy 353, 360, 371  
 Avraham Abulafia 463, 467  
 'Ayn al-Shifā mosque 57  
 Bāb al-Abnā' 78 n. 77, 82, 206 n. 52, 207,  
   218 n. 107  
 Bāb al-Baḥr 76–77, 215, 219, 220 n. 113  
 Bāb al-Riyāḍ 75–78, 82, 202  
 Bāb al-Sūdān 206 n. 52, 217  
 Bāb sūq al-dajāj 476 n. 184  
 badge (worn by the Jews) 439–440,  
   445–446, 461, 484  
 Bagheria 239, 242–243, 246  
*Baiuli* 492, 496  
 Balarm 63, 197–198, 439  
 Baldwin I of Jerusalem 136  
 Balearic islands 251, 339, 346  
 Ballarò 242, 249, 258, 376  
 Banking activities 241, 256, 259–260,  
   263–264, 340, 342–343, 345–348  
 Banū al-Ṭabārī 47, 51 n. 59  
 Banū l-Hajar 112, 114  
 Barbary 240, 356  
 barbers 277–278  
 Barcelona 2 n. 9, 240, 261, 263, 317, 338,  
   343–346, 348, 518  
 Bardi 238, 259, 340  
 Barisano of Trani 394–395  
 Barqa 442  
 Bartolomeo Lagumina 81 n. 90, 158  
   n. 49, 483  
 Basilean monasteries 421  
 Baucina 245  
 Bebilbacal 219, 309  
 Belisarius 11–12, 25, 34  
 Belladeb cf. Yiṣḥaq Ibn al-Aḥḍab  
 Benedictine order 171, 223, 361, 385, 389,  
   406  
 Benjamin of Tudela 335, 447, 451  
 Berbers 45, 47, 90–92  
*bet din* (rabbinical court) 442  
 Biaxander 433  
 Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat.  
   Ebr. 190 473 n. 170  
 Biblioteca Comunale 295 n. 80, 484  
 bilingualism 419  
 Bivona 31 n. 121, 238  
 blacksmiths 52, 277–278, 461  
 Blanche of Navarre 306, 345, 414  
 Bonformello 253  
*borgesi* 237, 244, 288–289, 291, 293, 517  
 bread 195, 238–239, 277, 325, 368  
 brokers 259, 281–282, 285, 345  
*buchiria Iudeorum* 454, 484  
 Bundār 442

- burial 352–354, 356–358, 367, 369, 406  
 butter 238–239, 245  
  
*cabella buchirie*, cf. *Buchiria Iudeorum*  
*cabella fumi* 447, 455, 484  
*cabella iocularie* 455  
 Caccamo 238–239  
 Cairo 2 n. 4, 48, 51, 53, 55, 70, 78–79, 94,  
 97, 123 n. 142, 145 n. 16, 148 n. 25, 149,  
 158 n. 52, 224–225, 227, 326, 425  
 Cairo Geniza 33, 51, 53–54, 195, 327–328,  
 330, 437, 440  
 Cala 248, 306, 378  
 Calabria 24, 108, 172 n. 86, 247, 249, 263,  
 302, 307, 386, 390, 418, 421  
 Calamigna 245  
 Calascibetta 506  
 Caliph 45, 48, 50, 54, 56, 64 n. 15, 69–70,  
 78, 157 n. 49, 212, 302  
 Caltabellotta 3, 434–435, 452, 515  
 Cammarata 247, 254, 262  
 Campania 36, 249, 326, 333, 343, 391, 393,  
 424, 426, 429 n. 61, 489 n. 3  
 Campanians 391 n. 31, 426  
 canons 102, 207, 237, 259, 360–361, 363,  
 395, 398  
 cantor (*hazzan*) 442, 451  
 Capaci 243, 245  
 Capicello/Sant'Erasmo 253  
 Cappella Palatina: first church 139–144,  
 145 n. 15, 146–148, 150–151, 154, 165, 203  
 n. 36, 207, 351–352, 360–361, 366, 383,  
 397, 400–401, 421  
 Captain 274 n. 11, 499, 503, 511, 513  
 Capua 202 n. 29, 356, 425  
 Capuans 426  
 Carastono 241, 243, 363, 429  
*caricatori* 252, 258  
 Carini 14–15, 209, 217 n. 100, 242–247,  
 251, 377  
 Carthage 11 n. 2, 14, 37  
 Casa Professa 484  
 casalina 449, 478  
 Cassaro 1 n. 2, 52, 63, 67, 76 n. 64, 78–79,  
 83–84, 86, 100, 196, 207, 209, 211–219, 221  
 n. 119, 222–223, 227, 236, 250, 258, 271,  
 319, 331, 334–337, 350, 352–353, 355,  
 357–358, 362, 365, 376–378, 449,  
 475–480  
 Castellammare del Golfo 239, 258  
 Castello a Mare 68, 204 n. 45, 212,  
 216–217, 219 n. 111, 226, 339, 345  
 Castello S. Pietro 67  
 Castelvetro 239, 247  
 Castilian 422 n. 32, 432–433  
 Castronovo 238, 351 n. 6  
 Castroreale 497  
*castrum superius* or *novum* 201  
*castrum vetus* 201  
 Catalan (*language*) 427–428, 431–433  
 Catalans 3–4, 240–241, 243, 248, 252, 256,  
 258–261, 263–264, 287, 301, 325, 339–340,  
 342–343, 345–346, 360–361, 363, 414, 452,  
 455, 458, 500, 503  
 Catalonia 4, 252, 263–264, 296, 337, 339,  
 345–346, 359, 517 n. 68  
 Catania 3, 14, 19, 34, 37, 49, 236, 248, 262,  
 314, 317, 340, 345, 347–348, 361, 366, 371,  
 377, 386, 405, 414–415, 432, 435, 443, 460,  
 490, 495, 518–519  
 catapan 278, 280, 520  
 cathedral 57, 65, 66 n. 23, 69 n. 35, 167,  
 203, 205–207, 211, 216, 218 n. 107, 237,  
 295, 300–301, 303–304, 308, 310, 312–315,  
 319, 351–352, 358–364, 366–367, 372–379,  
 383–384, 388–391, 393–396, 400–401,  
 403–405, 407, 417, 421, 445, 471, 492  
 Cava dei Tirreni 385, 393  
 Cefalù 17, 18 n. 42, 33 n. 140, 139, 141, 152,  
 158 n. 51, 165, 172, 174, 247, 262, 361, 383,  
 387, 389, 390–391, 396, 401, 405–406,  
 449  
 cemeterial areas 63  
 cereals 237, 244, 246, 326, 337, 507  
*chabora Iudayce* 485  
 Chancellery 114, 135, 417, 421, 425–426,  
 429 n. 61, 432–436, 448, 468  
 chansons de geste 420  
 chapel dedicated to saints Philip and  
 James 140, 160  
 chapel, Santa Maria de Monserrato 357  
 charitable institutions 355, 442, 475  
 Charles of Anjou 2, 451  
 Chatzerinel gate 217  
 cheese 237–238, 245–247, 261, 265, 277,  
 331, 344, 441  
 Chiaromonte 3, 276, 296, 309, 313,  
 315–317, 319, 340–342, 414, 429, 431  
 n. 71, 452  
 chivalric literature 432  
 Christian Arab minority 418–419  
 Church of Rome 21, 29, 31, 35  
 Ciminna 238, 244, 480  
 citizenship 283–284, 286, 292, 475  
 City council 200, 280, 288, 291, 492, 508  
 city walls 12, 16 n. 30, 26, 29, 47, 77, 157,  
 167–168, 197, 236, 306, 315, 318, 372, 477,  
 516–517, 519

- cives* 274 n. 12, 277, 283, 311, 453, 475, 491, 499  
 cloths 240, 242, 256–257, 262, 265, 278, 342, 368  
 code switching 434  
 codice Fitalia 430  
*collette* 274–275, 278, 517 n. 68  
 Communal piety 371  
 Compromise of Caspe 317, 491  
 comtal court 416  
 Conca d'Oro 1, 34, 242, 250, 253, 258, 299, 336, 344, 362, 365, 374, 383, 416  
 Conceria in the Seralcadi 479  
 confraternities 99, 279, 287, 343, 355–358, 366–367, 369, 375  
 confraternity of saint Ranieri 357  
 congregational mosque 57, 64–66, 75, 78, 97, 156 n. 45, 203, 299  
 Conrad IV 413, 431  
 consolatory motive 118  
 Constantinople 12 n. 5, 13 n. 15, 17 nn. 38, 40, 22, 34, 38, 42, 152, 208 n. 62, 263, 326, 406, 432, 474  
 Constitutions of Melfi (1231) 446  
*Consuetudines* of Palermo 239, 261, 370 446  
*Consuetudines terre Platee* 494  
 consular Court 261  
 Consulates 258  
 consuls 279–281, 375, 518, 519 n. 75  
 Continent friars 243, 249, 354–355  
*contrata Iudayce civitatis Panormi* 479  
 Corleone 238–239, 244, 250, 262, 274 n. 12, 351 n. 6, 353, 361, 423, 491–492, 505 n. 36  
 coronation ceremonies 300, 374  
 Corradin 430  
 Cosmas and Damian (saints) 357, 366  
 cotton 52, 221 n. 120, 240, 277, 331–332, 342, 344–345, 347, 369, 373  
 court eunuchs 212, 218, 307  
*Cronica Sicilie* 429 n. 60, 430–431  
 Crown of Aragon 317, 345, 427, 432, 452, 461, 500, 502  
 Cuba 79, 83, 140, 162–166, 242, 251, 304  
 Cultural production 91–93, 102, 119, 413, 415, 428, 465  
*curia Iudeorum* 472  
 customs 162, 220, 227, 251, 269, 277–278, 282, 293–294, 295 n. 80, 301, 316, 330, 335, 447 n. 45, 464, 474, 494, 519, 521  
 Customs of Palermo cf. *Consuetudines* of Palermo  
 David Lu Medicu 456, 472, 478  
*dayyan kelali*, “supreme judge” 441, 443, 453, 458–459, 465, 472  
*De acquisitione insule Sicilie* 431 n. 69  
 de Medico 458 n. 99, 464  
*De secretis Legis (Sitre Torah)* 467  
*defensa* 446  
*defensor* 21–22, 27, 31  
 Demenna 441  
 demographic conjuncture 235, 330, 335, 423  
 devotion 313, 349, 352–359, 365–371, 374–379  
*dictamen* 429–430, 433–434  
*dienchelele* cf. *dayyan kelali*  
 dispute of Tortosa 469  
 Doge of Venice, Sebastiano Ziani 333  
 Dominican Pietro Geremia 485  
 Dominican Pietro Ranzano 471  
*domus Iudeorum* 483–484  
*donjon* al-Manār of the Qal'a Bani Ḥammād 165  
 Duke Roger, the son of William I “the Bad” 303  
 eastern Sicilians 424  
 Egypt 33, 45 n. 32, 48, 55, 70, 77–78, 80, 93, 103, 106, 114, 120, 134 n.3, 225, 328, 346, 421, 438, 440, 444, 448, 465  
*ekklesia ton iudaion* 481  
 electoral mechanisms 288  
 Elizabeth of Corinthia 313  
 England 329, 398 n. 55, 421  
 Enna 33 n. 140, 40, 262, 421, 443  
 Ephraym ben Yiṣḥaq 447  
 epigraphy 4, 417  
*episkopeion* of Saint George 28  
*Epistola ad Petrum Panormitane Ecclesie Thesaurarium de calamitate Sicilie (Letter to Peter the Treasurer of the Palermitan church on the calamity of Sicily)* 210  
 epistolary 110, 113, 120–121, 430, 440  
 eremitism 353–354  
 Étienne du Perche 329, 421  
 Eugenio tou Kalou/Abū l-Ṭayyib 481  
 Eugenius (emir) 216, 417, 419  
 Eugenius, son of George of Antioch 477  
 Euphemios 12, 39  
 exotic animals 304–305, 307  
 exoticism 96, 334  
 exports 221, 237, 251, 254, 255, 265, 327–328, 332, 441

- expulsion of the Jews 4, 236, 262, 265,  
     413, 436  
*exteri* 277, 281–284, 475
- factions 48–49, 50 n. 55, 290–291, 340,  
     460  
 Faraj b. Sālim of Agrigento 451  
 Fatimid *da'wa* 95  
 Fatimids 2, 44–46, 48, 51, 54, 62, 69–70,  
     71 n. 41, 74, 78–80, 86, 91, 135–136,  
     158 n. 52  
 Favara 109, 140, 159, 243, 304–306,  
     449–450, 480  
 Feravecchia or *Platea asinorum* 247, 250,  
     268, 376–377, 381–382, 479  
 Ferdinand the Catholic 4, 264, 269, 318,  
     452  
 Ferdinando de Antequera of Trastámara  
     491  
 Ferrante 491  
 Ferrara of *porta Iudaica* 479  
*fiqh* 97, 100–102  
 fish 109, 239, 249, 253–254  
 Fishing 249  
 Flagellants 357  
 Flanders 240, 251–252, 263, 342  
 Flavius Mithridates, cf. Guglielmo  
     Raimondo Moncada  
 flax 35  
 Florence 240, 251, 259, 285, 339,  
     346–347  
 Florentine companies 255, 259, 263  
 Foggia 425  
*forma urbis* 197, 198 n. 13, 226  
 Forty Martyrs 218, 350 n. 4, 357, 366  
*Forum saracenorum* 213, 215  
 Franciscan Matteo of Agrigento 485  
 Franciscan spirituals 313, 461  
 fraticelli 353  
 Frederick I Barbarossa 333  
 Frederick II 2 nn. 5, 9, 91, 236, 255, 272,  
     307–308, 312, 315, 336, 338, 399, 413–414,  
     415 n. 7, 423–427, 429–431, 443, 445,  
     447–448, 453, 466–467, 477, 484  
 Frederick III 3, 272, 275, 283, 302, 306,  
     311–314, 342, 414, 427, 429 n. 60, 452, 454,  
     461, 478, 490–492, 493 n. 8, 495, 497, 516  
     n. 67  
 Frederick IV 3, 306, 316–317, 341–343, 461,  
     490, 496–498  
 French 2, 57 n. 82, 123 n. 139, 241,  
     258–259, 310, 338, 389, 418 n. 19, 432  
 fulling-mills 250  
*funduq al-Samanṭārī* 476  
*funduq al-zabib* 476  
*funduq-s* 53, 81 n. 91, 219, 227  
 funerals 273, 351, 356, 360, 367, 458  
 Fustāt 55, 224, 326, 442
- gabelle on wine 445  
 gabelles 251, 259, 265, 454, 497–498, 519  
*gabelloti* 243  
 Gaeta 243, 256, 263–264, 346  
 Gaetani 260, 264, 347  
*gaiti* 104, 302, 308  
 Galka 206–209, 215, 236, 477  
 gardens 1, 22, 28–29, 53, 73, 75–79, 84,  
     109, 114, 140, 161, 199, 202, 206, 211–212,  
     216, 223, 227, 236, 242–244, 247, 251, 304,  
     344, 362, 479, 481, 485  
 Garraffo 220  
 gate of Iron/bāb al-Ḥadid 476  
 Gaudius Alachadeb cf. Yişḥaq Ibn  
     al-Aḥḍab  
 Genoardo (*Jannat al-arḍ*, Earthly  
     Paradise) 140, 312  
 Genoese 204, 220–221, 240–241, 250,  
     252, 257–258–259, 261, 263, 277, 282, 285  
     n. 51, 325, 331–333, 339–342, 345, 354,  
     357, 360–361, 444, 507–508  
 Geoffrey Martorana 216  
 George of Antioch 21 n. 63, 114, 135, 141,  
     148–149, 153, 162, 213, 216, 301–302, 309,  
     418, 477  
 George of Cyprus 15–16  
 Geraldo 355  
 Gerardo (Gerardulo) Millino 507  
 Gerardo Agliata 363, 471  
 Germany 236, 307, 413  
 Gharb/Garbo 423–424, 447–452, 477, 484  
 Ghibellines 2–3, 353  
 Giovanni Scriba 111, 332  
*gisia*, cf. poll-tax”  
 Gispert de Isfar 453  
 Giuliana 238, 262  
 Godrano 245–246  
 Gonzalvo de Ayçoça 453, 458  
 Gothic architecture 353  
 government palace 65  
 governor of the Jews (*protector Iudeorum*)  
     453–454  
 Graeco-Arabic bilingualism 418–419  
 grain 52, 237–238–239, 244, 246–247, 251,  
     255–258, 261–262, 265, 287, 327, 332,  
     341, 344, 347, 373, 441 n. 12, 508, 510, 514,  
     519, 522  
 Granada 379, 442, 460, 462, 465  
 great mosque cf. congregational mosque



- Greek 4, 39 n. 3, 90, 111–112, 126, 143, 148  
 n. 24, 151, 162, 171, 172 n. 86, 173, 203,  
 204 nn. 42, 45, 209, 214, 223 n. 129, 243,  
 299–300, 308, 326–327, 330, 349–353,  
 361, 365, 371, 379, 387 n. 16, 389, 398,  
 398 n. 59, 399, 413, 417 n. 13, 418–421,  
 422 n. 32, 423–424, 426, 432, 436,  
 445–446, 463, 477, 481
- Greek orthodox network 421
- Greek rite 203, 217–218, 350, 419
- Gregory the Great 15–16, 18, 20, 22,  
 27 nn. 98, 102, 28, 31, 33 n. 140, 35, 384,  
 415 n. 7, 438, 480
- greuges* or *agravios* 503
- Guelphs 2, 308
- Guglielmo Apulo 201
- Guglielmo de Insola 516 n. 65
- Guglielmo Raimondo Moncada *alias*  
 Flavius Mithridates 435, 467, 470–471
- Guilds 277–278, 280, 288–289, 294, 518
- Hārāt Masjid Ibn Ṣaqlāb (Quarter of the  
 mosque of Ibn Ṣaqlāb) 75, 197
- hadīth* 94, 100, 103, 125
- Halaka* 466
- Ḥananya ha-Kohen 481
- hanīn ilā' l-awṭān* 115
- Ḥāra tusammā muṣallā Abī Ḥajar 476  
 n. 184
- Ḥārat Abī Ḥimāz 197, 476 n. 184
- Ḥārat al-farīda 476 n. 184
- Ḥārat al-jadīda (New quarter) 75
- Ḥārat al-Ṣaqālība (Quarter of the  
 Slaves) 75
- Ḥārat al-Tājī 197, 476 n. 184
- Ḥārat al-Yahūd 476
- Ḥārat Bani Lakhm 476 n. 184
- Ḥārat hufrat ghullān 476 n. 184
- Ḥārat kanīsat al-farūḥ 476 n. 184
- al-Harawī 57, 111, 214–215
- al-Ḥasan b. Aḥmad b. Ibn Abī Khinzīr 44
- al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī b. Abī al-Ḥusayn 46–47
- Ḥasan b. Khalaf of Baghdad 447
- Hāshim b. Yūnus 107
- Hauteville 2, 7, 91, 112, 133, 134 nn. 3, 5,  
 135–136, 141, 148, 168, 195, 202, 236, 300,  
 302–304, 383, 404
- al-Ḥāwī* (*Liber continens*) 451 n. 69
- Ḥayy Ga'on 465
- Ḥayyim the *wakīl* of the Sicilian merchants  
 in Egypt 444
- Hebrew 54 n. 70, 90, 420, 434–435, 439,  
 446, 453, 463–464, 468–469, 471, 473,  
 475
- Henry Aristippus 417
- Henry VI Hohenstaufen 2 n. 6, 302, 304,  
 306–307, 311, 404, 414 n. 6, 445
- heqdes* 442
- heresy 353, 370
- Hohenstaufen 2, 91, 413
- homiliary 421
- hospicia* 224
- hospital of San Bartolomeo 238
- hospital of Sant'Anna delle Scale di  
 S. Martino 374
- hospitals 30, 214, 217, 238, 246, 291, 350,  
 355–357, 365, 374, 389, 475
- Housing in Norman Palermo 221
- Hugo Falcandus/Pseudo-Falcandus 208,  
 211, 419
- humanists 415, 433
- hydraulic engineering 140, 162
- Iacob Xarchi 460
- Iato 235, 239, 371
- Iberian kingdoms 491
- Ibn Aghlab 106
- Ibn al-Athīr 13, 39 n. 3, 40 nn. 5, 6, 48,  
 51 n. 59, 65, 67, 74
- Ibn al-Ba'ba' 444
- Ibn al-Bannā' 444
- Ibn al-Birr 470
- Ibn al-Hawwās 49
- Ibn al-Kahḥāla 101
- Ibn al-Qaṭṭā' al-Ṣiqillī 103, 106
- Ibn al-Ṣayrafi 106
- Ibn al-Thumna 49, 108
- Ibn Bashrūn 114
- Ibn Ḥamdis 107, 113, 115, 116, 122, 215
- Ibn Ḥammūd 49
- Ibn Ḥawqal 40, 52–53, 55, 57, 58 n. 86,  
 61, 64 n. 14, 65, 69, 71, 73–76, 77 n. 72,  
 78, 81 n. 91, 82, 86, 88, 95–96, 98,  
 157 n. 47, 200 n. 22, 295, 299 n. 2,  
 326–328, 475–476, 483
- Ibn Hishām al-Lakhmī 104
- Ibn Jazla 451 n. 69
- Ibn Jubayr 57, 95–96, 98, 100, 149,  
 159, 203, 207 n. 55, 210–212, 214–215,  
 220 n. 113, 222, 224, 301, 309, 327, 334,  
 419
- Ibn Makkī 103–104
- Ibn Maklāti 49
- Ibn Mankūt 49
- Ibn Qalāqīs 110–112, 114, 120–122, 124,  
 210
- Ibn Qurhub 44, 56
- Ibn Quṭīyya 106

- Ibn Sīqlāb 475–476, 483  
 Ibn Zafar al-Ṣiqillī 120, 123  
 Ibrāhīm II 56, 65, 440  
*Ideisin* cf. Quarter of Denisinni  
 al-Idrīsī 61, 93, 126, 209–213, 220 n. 113,  
 327, 334, 417  
 Ifriqiya 2, 12, 39 n. 3, 40, 42, 44, 46,  
 47 n. 43, 48, 54–55, 58–59, 62, 65, 77,  
 79–80, 86, 94, 98–99, 107, 116, 135, 158,  
 203 n. 38, 225 n. 138, 438, 440  
 immigration 241, 250, 281–282, 347, 361,  
 418–419, 421–423, 434  
 imports 14 n. 19, 33, 239, 243, 262  
 individual piety 351–352  
 Indulci/Indulzi 150 n. 28, 216, 422  
 Innocent VIII 435  
 inscriptions 16 n. 31, 33–34, 56, 76,  
 81 n. 90, 97, 149, 151, 153 n. 39, 157 n. 49,  
 158–159, 161–162, 170, 331, 392–394, 395  
 n. 46, 400–401, 420, 471, 483  
 institutional autonomy 270  
 institutional Latin 431  
 insurance 258, 260, 263, 345  
 intermediary (*medianus*) 460  
 Iosue Bennacrimi of Randazzo 459  
 iron 53, 240, 247, 257, 314, 330, 337  
 al-İṣfahānī 106, 114, 117  
 Islamic conquest 37, 42, 62–63, 90,  
 326–327  
 Islamic culture 57, 92, 135, 155, 157–158,  
 227  
 Italian dialects 420  
 Iudaica 479–480  
*ius prothimiseos* 446, 477  
 Ja'far b. Yūsuf (Kalbid emir) 47, 78–79,  
 81, 120  
*jamā'a* 50–51, 443, 480  
 James (saint) 140, 160, 357, 368, 371  
 James II of Aragon 3, 374, 456, 490, 492  
*jāmi'* mosque cf. congregational mosque  
 Jerusalem 134 n. 4, 306, 371–372, 401,  
 442, 481  
 Jewish cemetery 442, 485  
 Jewish community 18, 22, 28, 336, 350,  
 420, 423–424, 428, 435, 438, 440, 442,  
 447–448, 451–452, 454, 456–459, 464,  
 468, 472, 480  
 Jews 4, 31, 90, 92, 196, 214, 217, 236,  
 243, 245, 253–254, 259, 262, 265, 345,  
 376, 379, 413, 436–439, 440–451, 453,  
 453–465, 467, 469–471, 473–485  
 Jews from the Garbo cf. Gharb  
*jihād* 42, 46, 98, 113, 439  
*jizya* 121, 226, 329, 439, 441, 445  
 Joan I of Naples 341  
 Joan of England 303, 318 n. 40, 386,  
 402 n. 74  
 John II of Aragon 4, 264, 293, 319, 465,  
 491  
 John of Palermo 425, 426 n. 50  
 Judaeo-Arabic 418, 420, 424, 434  
 judges 21 n. 64, 22, 58, 248, 275–276, 294,  
 330, 341, 350, 389 n. 24, 452 n. 71, 454,  
 457–459, 492  
 jurats 275, 281, 294, 360, 495, 505–506,  
 509, 516, 519  
 Kairouan 42, 44, 64, 66, 77, 91, 93–94,  
 97–98, 101, 118, 158 n. 52, 442  
 Kalbid emirs 75, 197, 209, 438  
 Kalbids 2, 45, 48, 62, 74, 79, 85, 108, 195,  
 236, 439  
 Kalsa 100, 213–214, 236, 242, 249, 271, 286,  
 311–312, 337, 353, 355–358, 361  
 Kemonia/*flumen Ballaro* 482  
*keneset*, but in Sicily also as *maskita*,  
 loaned from the Arabic *maṣjid* 475  
 Khalīl b. Iṣḥāq 45, 69  
 al-Khālīṣa 45–46, 52–53, 69–75, 77, 81, 86,  
 157 n. 49, 197–198, 209, 219, 220 n. 113,  
 271, 299, 475  
*kharāj* 439  
 Kharijism 97  
 Kingdom of Naples 2 n. 8, 4, 264–265,  
 339, 341, 343, 346, 348, 491  
 Kingdom of Sicily 2, 3, 300, 333, 340, 348,  
 383, 415, 418, 421, 446, 478  
*Kitāb Gharā'ib al-funūn wa-mulāḥ al-'uyūn*  
 55, 61, 69, 77–79, 81, 86, 197, 201, 209,  
 217, 476 n. 184  
*Kitāb nuzhat al-mushtaq fī ikhtirāq al-afāq*  
 126, 210  
*Kitāb Ṣūrat al-arḍ* 95  
 Koran 59, 76 n. 67, 97, 101, 103, 435  
 Kutāma 44–45, 48  
 “Little Idrisi” 128  
 Labrāt b. Mūsā b. Sughmār 443  
 langue d'oïl 420  
 Languedoc 250  
 Latin 3–4, 34, 92, 112, 126, 135–136, 145,  
 148 n. 25, 162, 171, 172 n. 86, 173, 196, 205,  
 209–210, 212, 214, 217, 223, 225–227, 271,  
 285, 300, 329, 334, 340, 351, 364–365, 389,  
 396–398, 413, 417–424, 426, 428–436,  
 445, 463, 467–468, 470, 472–473, 481  
 n. 215

- Latin notariat 426  
 Latinization 270, 311, 329, 333–334, 418, 423  
 Latino-Sicilian 434  
 Lattarini 219, 479  
 leather business 247  
 Lemmo de Bracco 511, 513  
 Leo III 17  
 Leonardo Fibonacci 425 n. 43  
 Leonus Millac 481  
*Liber ad honorem Augusti* of Peter of Eboli 210, 213, 218, 301, 303–304, 306, 311, 321–323, 477  
 Liguria 254, 285, 326, 332  
 Ligurians 285, 332  
 Lilibeo 11, 14, 16, 18, 23  
 linens 240  
 literary Sicilian 415 n. 7  
 local fiscality 498  
 lodges 248, 258, 285–287, 337–338  
 Loggia dei Catalani 375  
 Loire region 429 n. 61  
 Lombardy 420, 426  
 London, British Library, Or. 2806, f. 11a 469 n. 150  
 Louis of Sicily 340  
 Louis of Taranto 341  
 al-Qā'im 69–70  
 Lucca 248, 263, 285, 357  
 Lucera 91, 235, 336, 426  
 Lucia (saint) 351, 366  
 Lucrezia Di Leo 482  
*Luminaria* 248, 275, 279, 319, 372, 375  
 lyric poetry 427
- macellus Iudeorum* 484  
*madih* or panegyric 107  
 al-Madīna/the City or Şiqilliyya/Sicily 41, 327, 439  
 Madīnat al-Zawīla 71–72, 74  
 Madīnat Balarm 56, 63, 69 n. 35, 70, 72, 75–78, 81, 196  
 madīnat Şiqilliyya 195, 198, 211, 227, 439  
 Madonies 239, 245, 253, 262  
 madragues 249, 253–254  
*maestri di piazza* 278, 293, 294  
 Maghreb 39 n. 3, 45, 59 n. 89, 63, 85–86, 163, 203, 254, 263, 334, 336, 344, 424 n. 38  
 Magione 67, 83, 139, 167–168, 171–172, 312, 350–351, 353, 355, 362–363, 366, 374–376, 378, 449 n. 60, 483, 485  
*magister (magistri)* 22–24, 173, 208, 280, 288–289, 425 n. 43, 446, 449–451, 456, 458, 468, 472–473, 478, 513 n. 60, 518, 519 n. 75  
*magister Iudeorum Panormi* 456  
*magister militum* 22–24  
*magister xurte* 478  
*magistri* 173, 280, 288–289, 472, 519 n. 75  
*magistrum* 451  
*Magna curia* 341, 425–426  
 al-Mahdiyya 55, 71–72, 74, 442–443, 445  
 Maio of Bari 141, 153, 162, 216  
 majolica 240  
 Malaga 240, 319  
 Malikism 98, 100–101  
 Malta and Gozo 451  
*mandre* 242, 244, 258  
 Manfred 296, 308, 318 n. 40, 413, 415 n. 7, 424, 426, 429, 431, 446  
*Manifesto of Manfred to the Romans* 430  
 al-Manşūr 56  
 Maqāmāt 120  
 Marches 240  
 Maredolce cf. Favara  
 market 26, 52–53, 63, 64 n. 14, 69 n. 35, 72, 75, 81 n. 91, 129, 197, 209, 211–212, 219, 221, 237, 239, 242, 247, 255–256, 258–260, 262, 281–282, 285, 326–328, 330–332, 343–344, 346, 355, 359, 447, 474, 476, 520  
 Martin I the Younger 289, 306, 342–343, 345, 347, 452, 461, 468, 491, 499–500, 521  
 Martin II the Elder 4, 289, 317, 321, 342–343, 345, 452, 461, 468, 491  
*mashraba* 476  
 Maşli'ah ben 'Eliyya 442  
 massacre of the Muslims 212  
*massarie* 238–239, 242, 244, 247, 258  
 Matthew Bonellus 212  
 Matthew of Ajello 171–172, 217, 222–224, 387  
 Mazara 49, 50 n. 55, 54–55, 102–103, 152, 332, 386, 441, 443–444, 448, 466  
 meat 239, 245, 254, 277, 368, 371, 484  
 Melfi 356, 425, 446  
 Melkite rite 418  
 mendicant orders 353–354, 356, 358  
 merchant communities 285, 330, 337, 338–339, 341  
 merchant lodges 337  
 merchants 31, 52–53, 72, 195, 204, 210, 211 n. 74, 213, 219, 220 n. 115, 221, 235, 238, 241, 245, 248, 252, 254, 256, 259–263, 274, 281–282, 285, 287–288, 290–291, 293, 316, 325, 327, 330–331, 337–340, 342–346, 353, 363, 368, 370, 373, 441, 443–444, 460, 474, 492

- Messina 1, 14, 34 n. 140, 41, 59, 120,  
133, 142, 154, 168, 169 n. 79, 202 n. 32,  
205, 220, 240, 246, 248, 250, 256, 258,  
262, 267, 283, 285, 287, 291, 313, 330,  
333, 334 n. 47, 338, 349, 361, 385–386,  
390, 414–416, 421, 424, 426, 427 n. 52,  
428, 435–436, 441, 443, 447, 459–460,  
466–467, 492
- metals 53, 250, 264, 337
- Mezzoiuso 245
- Michael III 12
- Michael Scot 426
- Michele Amari 50, 51 n. 59, 73 n. 53,  
123–124, 127 n. 155, 159, 439 n. 4
- Michele da Piazza 316, 341
- Middle Arabic 103, 463
- milites* 273–276, 279 n. 29, 308, 312, 316
- mills 53, 75, 213, 219, 227, 249–250, 362
- Mineo 262, 351 n. 6, 495
- ministrali et artisti* 518
- minor friars 353
- miqweh* 475, 482, 484
- miserabiles* 517
- Mishneh Torah* 466
- Misilmeri 243, 300, 450
- miskita Iudeorum* (synagogue) 475, 480,  
482
- mobility 97, 281, 284, 286, 448, 522
- monasteries 19, 27, 217, 238, 244, 246,  
350, 352–356, 361–362, 374–377, 405,  
416, 421, 478
- Monastery of San Salvatore 204 n. 45,  
215
- monastery of the Holy Trinity 217
- Mondello 253
- monk 27 n. 101, 35, 43, 64, 74, 170 n. 83,  
172, 304, 311, 351, 361–364, 367, 385, 389  
n. 26, 393, 403–405, 439–440
- Monreale 139, 152, 172–174, 235, 237,  
242–246, 252, 318 n. 40, 352, 355, 361,  
363, 371, 383, 385–391, 393–401, 403–407,  
417, 480
- Montelepre 243–244
- Montpellier 239, 263, 466
- Morocco 421, 423
- mosaics 143–145, 148, 150, 318 n. 40,  
352, 384, 390, 396, 398 n. 59, 399–401,  
405–407
- Mosheh Ibn Tibbon 466
- Moses Maimonides 466
- Moses of Palermo 468
- mosque of Ibn Sīqlāb 483
- mosques 57, 63, 72–73, 75, 77 n. 72,  
81 n. 91, 96, 100, 129, 158 n. 52, 169,  
211 n. 74, 212–215, 222, 227, 299, 334–335,  
350
- Moyses Chetibi 478
- Moyses de la Bonavoglia 459–460, 472
- Mozarabs 149, 173, 215–216, 350, 422
- Mu'askar 73, 77, 202 n. 30
- Mu'tazilism 59, 97
- Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh the Secretary  
113
- Muḥammad b. 'Abdūn al-Sūsī 118
- Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn b. al-Qarqūdi  
al-Kātib 107
- Muḥammad b. Bashīr for Abū 'l-Ḥasan 'Alī  
113
- Muḥammad b. Ḥafāja 43 n. 23
- Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. al-Thumna  
443
- Muḥammad I 56
- al-Mu'izz 54 n. 69, 56, 66, 76, 78, 157  
n. 49
- multi-confessional city 349
- multilingualism 420, 463
- Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Heb.  
246 469 n. 154
- al-Muqaddasī 40, 53, 61, 69 n. 35, 74, 96,  
157 n. 47, 326
- muqarnas* 144, 146, 162, 166
- Murcia 240
- Museo Archeologico Regionale 82
- Mushrif b. Rāshid 107
- Muslim council (*shūra/jamā'a*) cf. jamā'a
- Muslim elites 203, 213, 215, 224, 227, 421
- Muslim population 196, 201, 210, 212, 215,  
219, 329, 418, 423
- mustahlaf* 207 n. 55, 212
- naqid* 442, 444, 456, 465
- Naples 2 n. 8, 3–5, 20, 23, 36, 236,  
240–243, 254–256, 260–261, 263–265,  
269, 302, 339, 341, 343, 345–346, 348, 353,  
385, 443, 452, 466, 491
- nations 257–258, 260–261, 283, 285–287,  
339, 407, 482
- Nestorian Patriarch of Baghdad 465
- Nicholas (saint) 357, 365–366, 369, 395
- Nicholas Logothete 223
- Nicolò Papalla, Friar Minor and Royal  
Chaplain 461
- Nissim de Randacio 473
- nobiles* 20, 21 n. 61, 505
- nobility 114, 127, 235, 237, 239, 242, 245,  
247, 276, 290, 315, 334, 360, 370, 428, 454,  
459–460
- Norman cathedral 66, 81, 389

- Norman conquest 91, 108, 118, 197, 203,  
     329, 413, 443, 489 n. 3  
 Norman French 420  
 Norman kings 139, 161, 396, 413, 419  
 Norman Palermo 108, 114, 124, 133, 139,  
     172, 221, 223–224, 226, 314, 416, 447  
 Norman places of recreation (*solatia*)  
     79–80, 83, 88, 140, 157, 166  
 Normans 76, 79, 91, 96, 103, 108, 110–111,  
     115–118, 123, 169, 196,  
     200–201–202, 203 n. 38, 204 n. 42, 209,  
     300, 310, 319–320, 328, 333, 431, 439,  
     443–444  
 North Africa 14, 67 n. 31, 101, 336, 345,  
     422  
 North-eastern Sicily 262, 418  
 notarial culture 418  
 notaryship 21 n. 64, 451, 460, 496, 515 n. 64  
 Noto 49, 107, 247, 351, 432, 443  
 Nuova Pretura 96
- Oberto Fallamonaca 425, 448  
 Observant Carmelites 356  
 Observant spirituality 354  
 Occitan 427  
 Ognissanti hospital 217, 230  
 oil 52, 238, 243, 331, 346, 441  
 oil-presses 250–251, 479  
 Olivia (saint) 351, 366, 377  
 Oran 423  
 order of Sant'Anna of the Steps of  
     S. Martino 355  
 Order of the Augustinians 353, 482  
 Oretò 53, 251  
 Oria 439  
 Ostrogoths 11  
 Otranto 418  
 Otto of Sankt Blasien 304–306  
 Ovadya of Bertinoro 462–463, 478
- pactist politics 500  
 painted wooden ceiling (Cappella  
     palatina) 144–145  
 Palace of the Normans 76, 319–320  
 Palace of the Slaves 207, 250  
 palaces 108, 129, 139, 156, 163, 166, 209,  
     211, 213, 222, 224–225, 227, 240, 300, 304,  
     319, 326, 365, 478  
*palatium arabum* 213, 215  
 Palazzo Chiaromonte cf. Steri  
 Palazzo comunale 312–313  
 Palazzo Bonagia 67, 83  
*paleapolis* 208
- Palermitan churches' floors 141, 143,  
     145–147, 149, 152–156, 173–174, 176, 180,  
     194  
 Palermitan court 120, 413–414, 425  
 Palermitan Sicilian 424  
 Palestinian Academy 442  
*paliò* 369, 375, 377  
 Paltì'el b. Shefatya 440  
 Pancras of Taormina 19, 351  
 Panormita 433  
 Panormos 41, 63, 327, 439  
 Papacy 2–3, 16 n. 33, 18, 20–23, 27, 29,  
     31–32, 35–36, 350 n. 3, 359, 385–386,  
     405–406, 438, 461  
 papal Curia 424, 429 n. 61  
 parishes 352, 365, 367, 381, 492  
 Parliament 236, 248, 264, 289, 319, 374,  
     459, 500, 502–503, 504 n. 35  
 Patti 373, 519  
 Peruzzi 238, 259, 340  
 Peter II 283, 313–314, 374, 429 n. 60,  
     453  
 Peter III of Aragon 2, 247, 310–311, 318  
     n. 40, 452, 490  
 Philagathos of Cerami 143, 421  
 Philip of al-Mahdiyya 445  
 Phillip of Argirò 351  
*piano della Marina* 247, 253  
 Piazza 239, 262, 494, 506, 511  
 Piazza Marina 53 n. 64, 69, 76 n. 64,  
     220 n. 113  
 Pico della Mirandola 471  
 Pierre de Blois 329, 419, 421–422, 429  
     n. 61, 439  
 Pietro della Vigna 310  
 Pietro Ranzano 210, 295, 432–433, 471  
 Pietro Speciale 295, 471  
 pilgrimage 57, 98, 121, 371  
 Pisan colony 428  
 Pisans 204, 256, 258, 260, 263, 286–287,  
     331, 337, 340, 347, 353, 357  
 plague 236, 238, 315, 356, 362, 364, 371,  
     377–379, 414  
 Plantagenet 329, 402, 421  
*platea marmorea* 478–479  
*plebs et gens* 511, 513–514  
*Poem of the basket (Mahberet ha-tenè')*  
     467  
 poetry of nostalgia 107  
 poets 47, 97 n. 25, 103–109, 113, 115–119,  
     122, 129, 364, 426  
 Polizzi 238–239, 247, 262, 361, 493, 495,  
     511

- poll tax (*gisía*) 226, 329, 441, 445, 454  
polyglossia 416  
Pontiff, pope cf. papacy  
*populares* 505–506, 512, 514–520, 522  
*populus* 280, 506, 509–511, 514, 517–518, 520, 522  
port of San Giorgio 253–254, 306, 310  
port 1, 11, 16, 25, 30–31, 35–37, 40, 55, 69  
n. 35, 71, 77, 197, 201, 204, 213, 219–220, 248, 253, 256–258, 261, 265, 286, 299, 306, 310, 312, 317–319, 325–326, 332–333, 337–341, 343–345, 375, 378, 479  
*porta Coperti* 207  
Porta dei Greci 248, 375  
Porta di Termini 217  
*porta Galkule* 207  
*porta Iudaica* 216–217, 219, 476 n. 183, 479  
*porta Palacii* 207  
Porta Patitelli or Conceria 258  
*porta Rote* 207  
porta Sant'Agata 204, 377  
*porta Trabocchetti* 207  
portolan master 237–238  
Praetor of Palermo 274, 478  
*Praetoritanum* 27–28  
praise poetry 107, 113, 120  
pre-humanism 431  
President 507  
Prizzi 239  
*Prophecy of the Sybil Erythrea* 419  
*prothi* 456  
Provençal 420  
Provence 2, 152, 326, 338, 372, 391, 432, 466  
Pseudo-Falcandus cf. Hugo Falcandus  
Ptolemy's *Optics* 419  
Puglia 201 n. 24, 205, 256, 302, 307, 386, 426  
*qā'a/s* 223 n. 131, 224  
*qahal* 442  
*al-qānūn* 475  
Qaṣr al-qadīm 63, 78, 196, 207, 209, 211, 214  
Qaṣr Sa'd 57 n. 83, 98–99, 159 n. 54  
Qaṣr Yannih cf. Enna  
Qayrawān cf. Kairouan  
quarter dinars (*rubā'i-s*) 56, 195, 441  
quarter of Denisinni 73, 213–214, 219, 477  
quarters 26, 52, 72, 74–75, 78, 100, 197, 210–211, 220 n. 113, 221–222, 236–237, 243, 249, 251, 258, 271, 277, 299–300, 311–312, 315–316, 353, 358, 362, 365, 375–376, 378, 420, 475, 476 n. 184, 479  
quarters *extra-moenia* cf. suburbs  
Quattrocento 434  
*quincunx* 145, 152, 155  
Rabaḍ al-Himā 72, 74  
rabbi Iona de Usuel 465  
*Rachaba* (Arabic: *Rahaba*) 476  
radical Mendicants 427  
Ramon Lull 427  
Ramon Montaner 310, 315  
Randazzo 361, 506  
raw silk (the Sicilian *lāsīn*) 328, 331, 441  
al-Rāzī 451 n. 69  
reformed Dominicans 461  
*Regles de trobar* 427  
*Regnum Siciliae* 443  
revolt 2, 4, 45, 69, 135, 212, 248, 269, 280, 287, 289, 291–293, 335, 338, 388, 447, 452  
rhetorical culture 429  
*ribā't-s* 57, 98–100, 129  
Richard the Lionheart 302  
Robert de Grandmesnil 389  
Robert Guiscard 108, 168, 169 n. 78, 195, 200, 202, 329, 389, 443, 445  
Roger I 202 n. 34, 329, 332, 443  
Roger II 2 n. 6, 21 n. 63, 61, 79 n. 81, 108, 126, 133–135, 139, 141, 142 n. 6, 143, 148 n. 24, 149, 160, 163, 165, 167–168, 202, 203, 205, 208, 210–211, 213 n. 79, 217, 296, 300, 302, 304, 309, 311, 320, 331, 333–335, 374, 383–384, 387–389, 399–400, 404, 406, 413, 417 n. 10, 419, 443–444, 447  
Romagna 240  
Romance idioms 418, 420–421, 424, 434, 463  
Romania 240, 263  
Rosalia (saint) 351, 355, 366  
Royal Court 237, 265, 269, 277, 281, 361, 415, 425, 507, 511, 513, 515  
*rubā'ī* cf. quarter dinars  
*ruga Catalanorum* 339  
Ruga di Pisa 376  
*ruga Pisanorum* 337, 479  
Ruggero da Palermo 426 n. 49  
Ruggero Mastrangelo 309, 310 n. 25  
Sabahon, son of Iuzeff, of Centuripe 456, 464  
Isabella I of Castile 4  
Ṣabra al-Manṣūriyya 66, 67 n. 29, 70, 80  
Saḥnūn 98–99, 101  
Saint Agnes 27  
Saint Hadrian 27  
Saint Hermes 27

- Saint Roch 379  
 Saint Theodore 27–28  
 Saint-Martin 27  
 Saint-Maxim-and-Saint-Agatha 27  
 Sala Verde 207–208, 229, 310–311, 314, 315,  
   317, 319, 321, 454  
 Salento 424  
 Salerno 202 n. 29, 302, 385, 391  
 salted fish 326  
 Samsām ad-Dawla 108  
 San Bartolomeo 238, 372  
 San Calogero 253, 351, 355 n. 10, 371  
 San Cataldo 139, 141, 146 n. 17, 151, 153  
   n. 39, 154–156, 167, 216, 352, 376  
 San Cusimano 359  
 San Domenico 83, 337, 353–354, 356–357,  
   359, 377–378  
 San Francesco 70 n. 37, 287, 337,  
   353–354, 357, 376, 479  
 San Giacomo la Marina 217, 220–221, 247,  
   207 n. 57, 371, 377, 478–479  
 San Giacomo la Mazara 207 n. 57, 358  
 San Giorgio 217, 310  
 San Giorgio in Alga di Venezia 358  
 San Giovanni alla Guilla 350, 355  
 San Giovanni degli Eremiti 27 n. 97, 139,  
   154, 157 n. 48, 167–169, 362  
 San Giovanni dei Lebbrosi 139, 169–170,  
   352  
 San Giovanni dei Tartari 359  
 San Giuseppe dei Teatini 476 n. 183  
 San Leonardo de Indulcis 218  
 San Martino 353, 355, 361–363, 367, 371,  
   374  
 San Martino delle Scale 246, 428 n. 58  
 San Matteo 374  
 San Michele de Indulcis 218, 361, 371  
 San Nicola de Chufra 218, 350  
 San Nicola de Kemonia 350  
 San Nicola de Logotheta 223  
 San Nicola La Carrubba 350  
 San Nicolò da Tolentino 483  
 San Nicolò Regale of Mazara 152  
 San Pancrazio 218, 350  
 San Pietro la Bagnara 169 n. 78, 204  
   n. 45, 217  
 San Salvatore 223, 449  
 San Sebastiano alla Marina 378–379  
 San Tommaso dei Greci 350  
 sanctuary (*hekal*) 482  
 Sant'Agata 204  
 Sant'Agostino 219, 353, 377, 378  
 Sant'Andrea 217, 220, 357  
 Sant'Antonio 352, 356, 376, 379  
 Sant'Elia 253, 476 n. 183, 480  
 Sant'Ermete 217  
 Santa Barbara 207 n. 57, 217  
 Santa Caterina 243, 309, 362–363, 371,  
   478  
 Santa Cita 356–357  
 Santa Croce 352  
 Santa Eulalia 357  
 Santa Fede 305  
 Santa Lucia 257  
 Santa Maria d'Altofonte 361  
 Santa Maria de Gesù 356  
 Santa Maria de Sykeki 361  
 Santa Maria degli Angeli, in Baida 362  
 Santa Maria del Cancelliere 362, 483  
 Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio known as the  
   Martorana 139, 140, 146 n. 17, 149, 150  
   n. 34, 151–153, 309, 313, 334, 351–352, 371,  
   376, 417  
 Santa Maria della Grotta 218, 350, 445,  
   481, 483  
 Santa Maria della Misericordia 355  
 Santa Maria delle Vergini 353, 362, 378  
 Santa Maria di Altofonte 246  
 Santa Maria in Valverde of Saint John of  
   Acre 353  
 Santa Maria la Pinta 207 n. 57, 358, 374,  
   378  
 Santa Maria Maddalena 139, 154, 167, 352  
 Santa Maria Maniace 385–386  
 Santa Marina 352  
 Santa Parasceve 218  
 Santa Trinità de Coperta 365  
 Santa Trinità of Delia 152  
 Santa Venera 350  
 Santes Creus 361  
 Santo Spirito or dei Vespri 139, 170–172,  
   251, 352, 361  
 Santo Stefano 216  
 Sardinia 3, 254–255, 326, 339, 346  
 schooling 364  
 schools 112, 364, 432, 465, 475  
 Sciacca 49, 168, 247, 258, 434–435,  
   506–512, 514–516, 518–520, 522  
 Scopello 249  
*scrutineum* 495  
*Sefer ha-maftehot (The Book of the Keys)*  
   467  
 Shelomoh Ibn Adret 467  
 Senate 29 n. 113, 246, 357, 375, 377, 379  
 senators 14, 29–30  
*senex, shaykh* 449  
 Seralcadi 213–214, 236, 271, 309, 312, 333,  
   336–337, 353, 355–358, 376–378, 479, 483

- servi camere regie* 446  
 Sfax 55, 113, 162  
 Sferracavallo 253–254  
 Shabbetay Donnolo 439  
*shāri'* cf. *shera*  
 Shemu'el b. Hoshā'na 442  
 Shemu'el ben Yosef *ha-rofē'* 473 n. 169  
 Shemu'el Ibn Naghrīla 442, 465  
*shera* 197, 206 n. 52, 207, 213–214, 216, 222  
 Shera Buali 214  
 shortages 238, 514  
 Sichelgaita, widow of Robert Guiscard 445  
*sikifa* 223–224, 227  
 silk 247–248, 250, 274, 301, 307, 309, 328, 331–332, 342, 369, 376, 441, 444, 451 n. 65, 461  
 Silvester, count of Marsico 153, 216  
*simāt* 44, 52, 64–65, 75–78, 196, 202 n. 30, 476  
 slaughterhouse 217, 445, 475, 479, 484  
 slaves 29, 43, 46 n. 38, 54, 71 n. 43, 244, 250, 254, 259, 308, 319, 325, 344, 351, 373, 375, 439, 445, 461  
 smiths 278, 479  
*sollempnitates* 447  
 southern France 466  
 Spain 84, 121, 405, 422, 434–435, 458  
 SS. Trinità cf. Magione  
 St George gate 217  
 St. Cyriac 204  
 Steri 81, 236, 295, 315, 317, 318 n. 39, 320  
 street of the spice-sellers (*al-attārīn*) 476  
*Studium generale* 465  
*Studium* of Naples 466  
 suburbs 65, 67, 69, 72, 74, 83, 140, 247, 271  
 Sufism 96–97  
 sugar 243, 252–253, 257, 261, 263, 266, 326–327, 344–347  
 sugar cane 53, 251–252, 319, 336, 344, 363  
 sugar refineries 247, 252  
 sumptuary norms 272  
 Sunni tendency 96–97  
 Swabian period 172 n. 86, 199, 210, 270–272, 426, 448, 453, 456, 466, 477, 489  
 Swabians 2, 308, 427 n. 54, 443  
 synagogues 22, 28, 31, 217 n. 101, 445, 449, 457–458, 475, 479–485, 483  
 synthetic culture 425  
 Syracuse 6, 13–14, 19, 25, 29 n. 116, 34–35, 37, 40, 43, 48–49, 64, 262, 326, 366, 386, 441, 443, 460, 469–470, 492  
 Syrian 26, 34, 37  
 Tancred 305–306, 414, 419, 445  
 Tancred of Lecce 304, 404  
*Taqwīm al-abdān* (*Tacuinus de febribus*) 451 n. 69  
*ṭarī* cf. quarter dinars  
 Tartary 240  
 taverns 243, 247–248  
 Teatro Santa Cecilia 221  
 Termini Imerese 14–15, 17, 18 n. 42, 158 n. 49, 239, 249, 258, 262, 466, 480, 481 n. 214  
 Terra di Lavoro 424  
 textual production 413–414, 416–417, 419, 421–422, 426–427, 434  
 Theobald 385–386, 393  
 Theodore of Antioch 427  
 Theodosius 43, 64 n. 13, 65, 67, 74, 439  
 third order of St. Francis 355  
 Thomas of Canterbury 365  
 throne 43, 64 n. 13, 112, 135, 146, 277, 304, 311, 317–318, 342, 401, 403–404, 413, 491  
 tithe 237, 349, 364  
 tithe (*ushr*) 441  
 Toledo 422, 469  
 Tommaso Fazello 299  
 Torre Pisana 139, 165–166  
 tower of *Baych/Bahr* in Palermo 471  
 Trabia 242, 251–252  
 trade 33 n. 134, 34, 52–55, 64 n. 14, 75, 85, 127, 212, 237–238, 241, 247, 251, 257, 260, 263, 277–279, 281, 287, 326–328, 330, 332–333, 335–341, 344–347, 355, 439, 443–444, 454, 460, 472  
 trade agreements 332  
 translation 3 n. 10, 70 n. 38, 90 n. 5, 110 n. 76, 115 n. 106, 123 n. 143, 127 n. 155, 139 n. 1, 164 n. 67, 376, 416, 419, 421, 425–426, 438, 447 n. 48, 451, 462 n. 121, 467–471  
 Trapani 17, 49, 55, 109, 254, 262, 283, 285, 371, 415, 434, 441, 460, 492  
*trappeti* 251, 253, 344  
 Trastámara 266, 360, 414, 491  
*Treatise on the Art of Logic* attributed to Maimonides 468  
 trilingual chancellery 417  
 Tripoli 55, 263, 340, 346  
 Troina 169, 247, 262–263, 419  
 tuna 247–249, 252–255, 257, 261, 265, 344–345, 347



- Turkey 240  
 Tuscans 259–260, 263, 285–286, 337–338  
 Tuscany 250, 254, 286, 346, 353, 356, 426, 493  
 Tyrrhenian 263, 328, 332
- Umiliati 250, 343  
*universitas* 276, 278, 280–281, 283, 291–293, 295, 429, 490–492, 494–495, 497–501, 506–508, 511, 513, 516, 518–519, 521  
*universitas Iudeorum* 459, 480  
 university 345, 415, 428, 431–432  
 urban form 61–62, 198  
 urban offices 275, 288, 495  
 urban provisioning 239
- Valguarnera 291  
 Vandal 16  
 Venera 351, 355 n. 10, 366  
 Venetians 204, 259, 333, 340, 378  
 Venice 126 n. 152, 333, 344, 346, 432  
 ventures 128, 148, 241, 245, 256, 259, 337, 375, 401, 460, 514, 519  
 Vernagalli 347  
 Vespers 2, 170, 266, 269, 270, 281, 286, 309, 312, 338–339, 355, 427, 431, 452, 454, 467, 490–491  
*vestibulum* 223, 227  
 via Calderai 482, 484  
*via coperta* 207  
 Via D'Alessi 82  
 via dei Catalani 337, 479  
 via Giardinaccio 482  
 via Marmorea 1 n. 2, 207 n. 57, 208, 213, 219, 223, 300, 319, 476  
 Via Parlamento 81  
 via Protonotaro 225  
 via Sant'Agostino/via Bandiera 219  
 Vicariates 415  
 Vice-regency 414  
 Viceroy López Ximen de Urrea 459, 511  
 Victor (bishop of Palermo) 15 n. 26, 18, 21–23, 28 n. 110, 29, 480  
 Villa Napoli 83, 140  
 Virgin Mary 365, 384, 393–394  
 Vita Xifuni 472–473  
 Vito (saint) 351, 374 n. 19  
 volgare illustre 415 n. 7, 424, 426, 428  
 volgarizzamento 431 n. 69
- wall 11, 25, 37, 66 n. 23, 69 n. 35, 72, 77, 83 n. 103, 142, 144, 146–147, 150, 153–154, 160–161, 164–165, 167–168, 197, 202, 206–207, 211 n. 74, 223 n. 131, 225, 249, 384, 393, 404, 485  
 Walter Ophamil 387  
 warehouse 195, 479, 485  
 Western Sicilians 426  
 Western Sicily 31 n. 121, 167 n. 73, 235, 261, 340, 362, 418, 423, 425, 426 n. 49  
*wilāya* 438  
 William I 134–135, 140, 142 n. 7, 144, 153, 161, 208, 303–304, 333–336, 383, 388, 400, 403, 419  
 William II 2 n. 6, 98, 110 n. 79, 120, 123 n. 39, 135, 140, 144, 153 n. 41, 161, 163, 171–172, 208, 213, 217, 303–304, 311, 318 n. 40, 333, 335–336, 383–388, 393, 395, 399–407, 413, 419  
 William II, duke of Puglia 205  
 wills 349, 351, 354, 356, 358, 361, 367–369, 371, 373  
 wine 35, 121, 238, 243, 247, 255, 327, 368, 371, 445, 449  
 wool 250, 277, 327, 332  
 woollen cloth 240, 250, 343  
 workshop 63, 75, 81 n. 91, 135, 145 n. 16, 156, 173, 225 n. 138, 250, 307, 332 n. 31, 342, 344
- xenodochia* 22, 31  
*xenon* 27–28
- Ya'aqov Anaṭoli 466  
 Yehuda bar Asher II of Burgos 469  
 Yehuda ha-Kohen b. Matqa 466  
 Yemen 466  
 Yirmiyahu/Jeremiah Kohen 471  
 Yiṣḥaq Ibn al-Aḥḍab 435, 469–471  
 Yosef b. Shabbetai 442  
 Yosef b. Shemu'el al-Dāni 442  
 Ysac Raba 474
- Zahr (The Flower) of Ibn Qalāqīs* 210  
 Zakkār b. 'Ammār 444  
 Zeno 15  
 Zirids 48, 79  
 Zisa 79, 140, 150, 158 n. 51, 161–166, 209 n. 66, 242–243, 250–251, 304, 450, 480